A Quarterly of New Literature

# ACCENT

Harry Slochower: *Modern Forms of Primitivism*

Hans Otto Storm: *The Little Plant*

Two Stories of the Jew in America—

Morton Fineman: *Maxie*

Ben Field: *An Answer for My Uncle*

A GROUP OF YOUNG AMERICAN POETS:

Clark Mills
Samuel French Morse
Jean Garrigue
Robert Fitzgerald
Gene Derwood
David C. De Jong

30 CENTS

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## A SEMI-ANNUAL BOOK OF LITERATURE, THE ARTS, AND CIVIL LIBERTIES

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To secure back issues of *Accent,* send 30c for one or $1.00 for four to Box 102, University Station, Urbana, Illinois. The principal contributions to Volume One were:

Autumn 1940—Stories by Levin, March, Neiman, Moser, Weidman; poems by Stevens, Nutt, Zaturenska, Rodman, Fitzell, Miles; articles by Filler, Aldington, Ferguson, White.

Winter 1941—Stories by Herbst, Cantor, Farrell, Clark; poems by Gregory, Lechlitner, Berryman, Brinnin; articles by Johnson, Rosenfeld, Powell, Daiches, Moore, Fitzgerald.

Spring 1941—Stories by Porter, Brace, Stuart, Proehl; poems by Burrows, Aiken, Brown, Moss, Abbe; articles by Ransom, Ferguson, Arvin, Miles, Hillebrand, Kirstein.

Summer 1941—Stories by Clark, Benardete; poems by Stevens, Davidman, Roskolenko; articles by Dos Passos, Burgum, Scott, Maas, Hayakawa; *American Poetry: 1930-1940* (a bibliography compiled by the editors with the help of R. P. Blackmur, Horace Gregory, John Holmes, and M. D. Zabel).

ACCENT

A QUARTERLY OF NEW LITERATURE

Volume 2, Number 1 Autumn, 1941

# HARRY SLOCHOWER:

## *Modern Forms of Primitivism from Gauguin and Hamsun to the American Agrarians*

Mythology relates that Antaeus, the son of Terra, was invincible so long as he preserved contact with his mother. From every fall, he rose renewed in strength, and thus succeeded in conquering all his enemies. All but one. That one was Hercules, who was to become the champion of man on the earth. Hercules vanquished Antaeus by strangling him in the air.

The Earth as stability, as man's "basic" security, is a recurrent and universal persuasion. Gospels of "return to nature" receive particular response in times when "airy" abstractions and mechanical relations tend to tear men away from their roots. Thus Rousseau found a deep echo at a time when sterile feudal forms and a young, conscienceless industrialism were stifling personality, when the "vision of numbers" was obscuring the view of qualities. As rococo forms, correct scholastics, and congealed rituals gave way to the complex mechanics of civilization, the simple and the concrete were rediscovered even as they were being pressed "inward."

Goethe's Faust is drawn to Gretchen, Andreyev's He and the Baron to Consuelo, Schnitzler's Fritz to Christine, as Sappho had been drawn to Phaon, Jupiter to Alcmene, and Lohengrin to Elsa. In the Panslavism of Dostoyevsky and of Tolstoy, we have the most impressive statement of the reservations against 19th century technical pressures. Dmitry Karamazoff prefers Siberian imprisonment to refuge in America. Tolstoy's Pierre likewise gains peace in his prison-pit and in the physical community of the war, discovering its concretization in the harmony of the simple peasant, Platon Karatayev. Nietzsche's desperate and extreme challenge to the threat of depersonalization by the "small reason" closes the century.

In our own century, the machine became to many, from the Expressionists to D. H. Lawrence and Aldous Huxley, the modern incarnation of anonymous evil. The tendency has been towards a devil's theory of the machine which does not distinguish between use and exploitation, between enslavement by the machine and enslavement by the manipulation of machine production.

This is still a widespread confusion. Yet, within its formulation, there resides a problem which is distinct from social organization, a problem inherent in technics itself. By its very *thoroughness* and *efficiency,* the machine threatens to deprive man of *work,* not merely of unpleasant and unrewarding work, but of all work. But man is "homo faber." To have a feeling of possession and of enjoyment, he needs contact, the physical, immediate contact got by personal labor. As technics becomes more and more proficient, contact tends to assume the character of a "delegate," of an instrumental intermediary between man and his object. (This is the point at which the Agrarians see the atomicity of technics translated into the political sphere under the form of mechanical democratic representation which destroys the sense of personal responsibility.) This "division" tends to make for physical as well as for moral alienation. For when we can gain power by moving levers, we have the condition for a morality through which we "get something for nothing," and man is deprived of "earning" his living. It is argued that once the social relations of technology are humanized these problems will receive corresponding adjustment. But many critics continue to fear that personal desiccation will result from any type of super-organization, even when it is freed of social inequities. Hence, these critics urge a pattern which would permit greatest *immediacy,* immediacy of awareness and way of living. The attitude aims to reestablish man's umbilical ties to his sources, to counter-act the divisive interpositions of automatic representations.

Every movement in our day expresses this fear in some way. From Henry Adams and Spengler to Kenneth Burke, from Van Gogh and Picasso to Karl Hofer, from Rimbaud and D. H. Lawrence to Georg Kaiser and James Joyce, from Thomas Mann to Doeblin and Hemingway, from conservative agrarians to radical socialists, warnings are sounded against the menace to man in the monolithic centralization of our modern Babylons.

## *I. The Imaginative Metaphor: Gauguin, Rilke, Hamsun*

> "La Barbarie est pour moi un rajeunissement. Je me suis reculé bien loin, plus loin que les chevaux du Parthénon . . . jusqu' au dada de mon enfance, le bon cheval de bois."
>
> Gauguin

After he had become a "bad European," Gauguin wrote to Strindberg, "Your civilization is your suffering. My barbarism is health to me." He argues that the Eve in civilized conception makes us women haters. "Only the Eve which I paint can pass before us in the nude. Yours would be brazen in this natural state and, if she is beautiful, she would become the source of suffering and evil." Gauguin had failed of recognition in Europe, and left its sceptical climate. In Martinique, and later in Tahiti, he thought that he had found what he was in need of, a sensuous primitiveness and "the nude simplicity of the pagan." He settles in Tahiti, lives amidst the natives, sealing the relationship by marrying a native girl.

Gauguin did not live primitively on Tahiti, but in relatively civilized comfort. The girl he married was fifteen, and Gauguin was about sixty years old. A good deal of sophistication was involved in this "natural" step. Was it not argued that European intellectualism and power stimuli drove men to reach out beyond their natural orbits, to patterns of living alien to their native requirements? Gauguin "proved" all this by his civilized primitiveness, and by his marrying a girl forty-five years younger than himself. Not long afterwards, Gauguin reverses his naturalism. He returns to the West. Here he again "goes primitive," attaches himself to a mulatto girl, is involved in brawls with drunken sailors on her account, and loses a leg. He returns to Tahiti, a cripple, and retires to the island of Dominica, an even more secluded wilderness.

Meier-Graefe writes of Gauguin that every fibre in him "belonged to cursed Europe." He calls attention to Gauguin's last work, a snowed-under village. But it was painted in the midst of a tropical spring! Gauguin's nostalgia for his native roots, indeed, the complete irony of neo-primitivism, is expressed in this painting. For modern primitivism takes on its characteristic features through the circumstance that it must needs operate in a non-primitive sphere. The idyllic vision arises in the midst of an alien context, that of our teeming thoroughfares. Its individualistic plea is made within an expanding collectivistic hubbub. Hence it becomes *neo*-primitivism, or a primitivism which allows strange elements to enter that modify its "purity." The very pattern which it would alter becomes part of the new pattern. The resulting criticism becomes partial, crossed by reservations. These reservations are, indeed, an indirect reflection of the naturalist's doubts with regard to his own program as meeting the evil of modernism.

To defy the unbending morality of technics, Gauguin went South. His alternative to hard regulations was a southern sensuousness, loose and

undisciplined. In Rainer Maria Rilke and Knut Hamsun, the anti-mechanistic metaphor is northern, restrained, forceful, and moralistic. Rilke did journey to Italy; since Goethe this pilgrimage had been considered essential for one's *Lehrjahre.* One spring morning, he sees before him a whole field of flowers, where only the day before there has not been a single flower. The initial pleasure of the sight dissipates, however, as the Northern writer soberly reflects that here, where everything blooms suddenly, it also withers rapidly. And where the eye is confronted with clusters, how can it take account of the individual things? "What does one little flower matter here," he writes, "where a million flowers bloom?" Rilke's poetry is dedicated to the particular and the unique, lost in the statistical collectivity of urban life. It would pay homage to the specific nature of each object. And Rilke's work combines such piety towards individuation with a religious sense of togetherness. It was this togetherness which drew him to Russia, the Russia of Tolstoy. "Russia . . . that is the land where men are lonesome human beings, each with a world within himself, each full of darkness like a mountain . . . If ever and anywhere I might acquire something like a home, it will be there, in this wide suffering land." In Paris (where he visits Rodin, the "Eastern God") Rilke passes much of his time in the churches. The noise and flattening drive of the metropolitan steamroller stifle man.

> For, Lord, the crowded cities be
> Desolate and divided places, . . .
> And men who dwell there heavy and humbly move
> About dark rooms with dread in all their bearing . . .
> And every child must be a saddened child.
> There blossom virgins to the unknown turning . . .
> And do not find for what their soul is burning,
> And trembling, close their timid buds again.

His metaphors aim at the *dematerialization* of the encrusted object. There is an incantational quality to his musical rhythms tending to "free" the spirit in things.

> So klangen Knaben an wie Violinen
> und starben fuer der Frauen schweres Haar;
> so gingen Jungfrauen der Madonna dienen,
> denen die Welt verworren war.

The art of another Northern writer, that of Knut Hamsun, is also auditory rather than visual. Here, too, we have the apotheosis of little things. *The Growth of the Soil* is a lyrical paean to

> the daily round, little matters that are all important to the settler-folk themselves. Oh, they are not trifles after all, but things of fate, making for their happiness and comfort and well-being, or against them.

Here, and in *Pan,* earthy living, living within a periphery which is limited yet allowing for fullness and intensity, is offered as Antaean compensation for a feverish, devitalizing industrialism. But simple reversions are not possible in the organic realm. The past may be "recaptured" in moments of mystic vision. But it cannot be *relived.* The naturalists "know" that. And they reveal this knowledge in many indirect ways. In the work of Hamsun, this indirect testimony may be detected in the very style and composition of what is perhaps the most eloquent artistic statement of "the natural life" in our time, *The Growth of the Soil.*

The novel was written during the First World War. In the midst of this inferno, Hamsun writes a kind of idyll in prose; during a period of disorganization, he pictures the growth of family ties. As anonymous millions frantically expend themselves in uprooting, Isak and his wife and their children work to enrich the soil which in turn enriches them. This extreme "repudiation" reveals the novel's polar relation to its discordant situation. The enormity of the realistic obstacles is "confessed" by Hamsun's simple circumvention of placing his character in a somewhat mythical setting. While a war is being fought because free land is no longer available, Hamsun's man

> comes, walking toward the north. He bears a sack, the first sack, carrying food and some few implements . . . Maybe the man has been in prison, and is looking for a place to hide; or a philosopher, maybe, in search of peace. This or that, he comes; the figure of a man in this great solitude . . . The morning shows him a range of pasture and woodland . . . He nods, to say that he has found himself a place to stay and live.

The novel closes in a pagan mood of "prayer."

> Isak at his sowing; a stump of a man, a barge of a man to look at, nothing more. Clad in homespun—wool from his own sheep, boots from the hide of his own cows and calves. Sowing—and he walks religiously bareheaded to that work . . . 'Tis Isak, the Margrave . . .
>
> 'Twas rarely he knew the day of the month—what need had he of that? He had no bills to be met on a certain date; the marks on his almanac were to show the time when each of the cows should bear. But he knew St. Olaf's Day in the autumn, that by then his hay must be in, and he knew Candlemas in spring, and that three weeks after then the bears came out of their winter quarters; all seed must be in the earth by then. He knew what was needful.
>
> A tiller of the ground, body and soul; a worker on the land without respite. A ghost risen out of the past to point the future, a man from the earliest days of cultivation, a settler in the wilds, nine hundred years old, and, withal, a man of the day.
>
> Nothing growing there? All things growing there; men and beasts and fruit of the soil. Isak sowing his corn. The evening sunlight falls on the corn that flashes out in an arc from his hand,

> and falls like a dropping of gold to the ground. Here comes Sivert to the harrowing; after that the roller and then the harrow again. Forest and field look on. All is majesty and power—a sequence and purpose of things.
>
> Kling . . . eling . . . say the cow bells far up on the hillside, coming nearer and nearer; the cattle are coming home for the night. Fifteen head of them, and five-and-forty sheep and goats besides; threescore in all. There go the women out with their milk-pails, carried on yokes from the shoulder; Leopoldine, Jensine, and little Rebecca. All three barefooted. The Margravine, Inger herself, is not with them; she is indoors preparing the meal. Tall and stately, as she moves about her house, a Vestal tending the fire of a kitchen stove. Inger has made her stormy voyage, 'tis true, has lived in a city a while, but now she is home; the world is wide, swarming with tiny specks—Inger has been one of them. All but nothing in all humanity, only one speck.
>
> Then comes the evening.

*Pan* and *Growth of the Soil* are in the nature of Platonic correctives offered in a time of empirical disorders. They are dream wishes and exhortations conditioned by doubt as to their pragmatic efficacy. An anecdote related by Hamsun's biographer, Walter Berendsohn, has bearing on this point: Knut Hamsun once received a letter in which a person describing himself as a neurasthenic asked Hamsun whether he might be allowed to spend some time with the author of *Pan*. He felt it would help him to quiet his nerves. To this request, Hamsun's wife replied that the house had enough with one neurasthenic.

Hamsun's subsequent work, written in a period of even greater dislocations, reveals these perplexities more directly. The Settler, Isak, gives way to August, the Wanderer. The glamour of the Glahns is gone. Hamsun's new characters are more obviously disturbed. An ambiguity enters into their natures, and they swerve between rootedness and vagabondage. These later novels more readily "admit" that the open spaces are being closed by the steely ring of technics. Abel, in *The Ring Is Closed,* is a pale shadow of Hamsun's earlier heroes. Hamsun would set him off against the modern climbers and the calculating, profitseeking townspeople. But Abel is shown as himself affected by the internecine Cain-civilization in which he lives. He has killed, and suffers from a sense of guilt, is himself a restless, wandering Cain. He is not attracted by the home-girls, but by sophisticated Olga. At the end, he leaves, not for some primeval northern woods in the manner of Isak, but for industrialized America.

Since *Growth of the Soil,* Hamsun's style has become more complex. The former epic and patient mood is disturbed by a halting, rambling narrative. His earlier substantive idiom of "noun" sentences becomes conditional, his sentences beginning with qualifying adverbs and clauses. Walter Berendsohn has called attention to the fact that even Hamsun's earlier nature world lacks plastic character. His metaphors are for the ear and

the mind, addressed to the "inner" world. Hamsun's recent works continue the diatribe against industrialism, but with greater impatience reaching the point of irritability. They are an expression of Hamsun's own modernism, his realization that the way back is closed. Isak was still able to find a retreat in the woods which he had cleared for sun and wind to enter. And he found a wife and human companionship. In his latest work, *Look Back on Happiness,* written under the shadow of Fascism, Hamsun "nature-retreats" to the bowels of the earth-pit, to a deserted hut of peat, "into which I must crawl on my hands and knees." And his sole companion is —a mouse.

## *II. The Social Graph*

> "The peasant is the soil. All great cultures have been rooted in peasantries, in free peasantries, I believe, such as the English yeomanry before the fourteenth century: they have been the growth of the soil."
>
> Allen Tate

Tolstoy rejected both Czarist feudalism and industrial capitalism. And he balked at socialism. Its planned, organized construction seemed to him "Western." The socialist analysis in terms of wages, rent, and capital, argues Levin in *Anna Karenina,* does not apply to Russia, where the peasant received food as wages, where there was no rent and little capital. Tolstoy opposed both organized collectivity and free individualism. He gravitated towards a sociality centering in a kind of small middle peasantry, a system of limited private property which would permit communality, or "living for one's soul," as well as individual spontaneity. Hamsun's social orientation approximates this middle position as well. In sharper outline, this approaches the program of the American Agrarians.

The central-motif of the Southern Agrarians is the call for repersonalization. This is the common axis of their attacks on monopoly capitalism, communism, the machine, and the structure of credits. Their symposium, *Who Owns America?,* is an impressive and passionate indictment directed against the abstract structure of ownership in the form of coupons, documents, and other neutral media. The technique of public exchange drives out personal use. The *contact* between work and reward is being lost, as the anonymous character of big business and of the collective property system destroys the concept of the individual value. There is no tangible friend here who might be loved, and no concrete enemy who can be fought. The sense of *moral* responsibility on the part of the individual is reduced by the collective pattern. "The standard of international morality," writes John Crowe Ransom, "is lower than the standard of personal morality, and the code of big business is lower than that of little business." This depersonalization of values ensues in *any kind of collectivity.* Hence the Agrarians also oppose socialism, as being anti-individualistic. Indeed, Belloc and

Tate see a tie-up between Big Business and Communism. "Corporate structure," writes Tate, "strives towards the condition of Moscow." In place of this trend, they urge "personal" ownership of concrete goods. Allen Tate regards the choice as not between property and non-property, but between one kind of property and another, between big and small ownership. The latter preserves "free initiative and free prices," and precludes sovereignty over the individual. Translated into a social program, repersonalization means private property on a small scale, mainly in the form of land and farm tools.

However, when the Agrarians develop this program, it turns out to be a much more modern version of Tolstoy's agrarianism. The firmer hold which industrialism has taken in America introduces a greater complexity. The American Agrarians more readily allow the partial inclusion of machine methods and of some general control. They more readily admit that the "personal" method is applicable only in a restricted sphere. This agrarian group does not hold up the pre-industrialized era as a complete model. Twentieth century America is too powerful a reality to be "wished" away. Agar, for example, clearly sees that the simple back to the land movement is impossible, and grants that the program is to provide for urban communities as well. He goes farther and concedes that certain industries (railroads, electric power utilities) function best under the monopoly system. That is, the Agrarians allow for *some* industrialization. They are also for *some* public control admitting the dependence of the individual upon social organization. Yet, although they grant that modern life necessitates general regulation in some measure, they seem to ignore the obligations which the individual in turn owes to the regulative public body. Kenneth Burke has neatly formulated this stand as "representation without taxation." This non-reciprocal approach also makes itself felt in the attitude towards the issue pertinent to the South itself, the relationship between the whites and the negroes. The Symposium is silent on this problem, except for the observation that there are those men whose "courage and intelligence entitle them to own, and also the men whose natural quality fits them to work for hire."

In the position of the Agrarians, we meet again with a form of modern "irony." There is a call for freedom, personality, and natural "rights," a call which contains the overtones of reservation which recognize the necessities of collective transcendence.

But literal returns are impossible, and such doctrines only tend to encourage distorted forms of regression, as when infantilism is identified with wisdom, and babbling rhythms with poetic metaphors. Pure reversals would negate the whole of our Western heritage. Where this may lead is seen when the doctrine is transposed into the principle of "Blood and Soil." Such transposition appears to have been made by Knut Hamsun. The creator of idylls has been urging coordination with the heavy Nazi machine.

Fascist distortions have been made possible, however, because the

Blood and Soil slogan touches on a genuine modern need. It is a need for First Principles by "recollection" of man's elemental origins. The recognition of this need is not confined to our simple naturalists. It is present in the philosophy of George Santayana, in much Catholic and even Socialist writing. In the theme of "Father-Imitation," it has taken form in our contemporary myths of Joyce's Earwicker, Werfel's Jeremiah, and Thomas Mann's Joseph, with their motif of permanent attitudes which have their prototype in the infancy of man's history. The call is here for refuelling from the base, for rediscovery of man's simple, irreducible requirements, of "the truth, the old truth." It would seem to be the persuasion of our great contemporary writers that this truth can be seen most purely through the unsophisticated forms of agrarian living. How else interpret the fact that every major work of our time which succeeds in the artistic molding of a powerful personality (in or out of tune with his community) operates within an agrarian setting? For this holds true not only for the more purely regressive themes of Proust and Undset. Even "the smiling future" which Thomas Mann looks toward is envisioned in agrarian surroundings (Castorp's dream, the story of Jacob and Joseph). More telling perhaps is that this agrarian predilection is found even among writers of socialist leanings. Thus, Nexö's Pelle returns at the end to "Daybreak Farm," Silone's *Fontamara* and *Bread and Wine* deal with the Ita'ian peasantry, Malraux's *Man's Hope* closes with the chapter on "The Peasants," and even the motorized journey of Steinbeck's people begins and ends in non-urban settings. However, in these instances, particularly in Mann, Malraux, and Steinbeck, we have no mere "return to nature." Their cultural conscience disallows any flat rejection of historical continuity. These writers avoid the dangers of mere "repetition" by taking the way "round." A state of balance cannot be reached by the negation of history or by "the burning of books," but only by amalgamation and integration. Even the German Romantic poet, Heinrich von Kleist, recognized that we must continue the journey in the hope that we may enter by the back door. It may be true that the ideal of "the complete man" is more nearly possible in an economy where men are not split up by "the division of labor," where specializations and departments do not compartmentalize human expression. But in the very interests of completion, man must somehow be integrated with what has become an ineradicable moment of his biography, the technical contribution of history. For good or for ill, man has left the idyll where he drew strength from the earth alone. Even our ancient myth recognizes this. It tells that Hercules, not Antaeus, became champion of the earth. To be sure, it was only by standing with his feet on the ground that Hercules was able to vanquish Antaeus.

# BEN FIELD:

## *An Answer for My Uncle*

After his arrival from Chicago, Uncle Meyer moved in with us. We had our own house then, so there was enough room for both families, and the children could play in the garden around the hydrangeas.

Uncle assured us that the moment he found a job he would go out and rent a lovely house. The moment stretched into months, the months ran into years. Having six more mouths to worry about, Mother became thin as a pick and had frequent fainting spells. Jack would come home from the shop where he worked as a mechanic, and fall into a rage to see her tending to both families. There would be violent quarrels between him and Father. The two had never got along. In his childhood Mother had always had to shield him from Father's wrath, and Jack's love for her and the temper which was sharpened by his long grueling hours of labor made him resent fiercely the added burden of Uncle's family.

It wasn't that Uncle was lazy, as Jack maintained. The trouble lay in his inability to hold on to work for any length of time.

Even Father often teased him gently. "You've had as many jobs as the Kings had women."

Easily upset, Uncle cracked his prominent knuckles till they sounded like empty nuts. "Brother, if those murderers had clubbed you with clubs, you too would be running around in a clouded world."

"Right, a thousand times right," was the soothing answer.

Aunty at the sewing machine seemed to forget that I was in the next room reading. "Always the eggs bother you men." A big harassed woman, every spring during her stay with us she spent a month in bed, went to a mysterious doctor, returned looking like a corpse, and for days we would find spots the size of half-dollars near the bathroom.

"How these women cackle," chuckled Father. "You are just threads and ribbons. Look at our mother, a girder of iron, may she rest in peace. At forty a widow, she married again, giving birth to me, Meyer, Isaiah, and—"

"Yes," interrupted Mother in her breathless way, "but you yourself have often said the children died like flies."

"Some didn't die. They were murdered by those beastly Christians," cried Uncle Meyer. "I can see it like it is today. The peasants must make sure if he is Jewish. They tear off his clothes. He is as old as my dear nephew." He pointed in my direction. "Like him like two drops of milk."

Aunty stopped her sewing. "We know, husband, we know."

He ignored her as usual. "A band of us young Jews got together. We are not going to be weaklings any more and let them twist us like Purim

tops. We arm ourselves."

In the midst of his story in came the children from the garden, pushing the baby carriage. Judah was first with the conductor's cap on his swollen head, pulling a string as a sort of bellcord and ringing an old alarm clock. Uncle had worked for a street car company. A passenger had called him a Jew when he had failed to ring a stop. He had given up the job after that incident. "Next stop Cooney Island," sang Judah.

"They attack us with clubs. We pay them back a thousand fold." He plunged his fist above his head. "Isaiah, oh brother of mine, we have not forgotten you!"

His groan made the baby pop into tears, and Bessie and Tessie on each side of the carriage began whimpering.

Mother took the baby into her arms. "Sister, go on with the sewing. I'll take care of the children."

Although three years old, the chicken-breasted baby could neither walk nor talk. Something appeared to be the matter with each of the children. Mother hinted marriages of first cousins were not good. Father swore, "It was the pogroms, those murdering hooligans."

We sat at the table, the boy with his conductor's hat swimming on his head, the girls sucking chicken bones and smiling through their tears.

The door flew open. In came Jack in his greasy work clothes. He washed his hands at the kitchen sink, and ate his soup glumly. After supper he packed his military pipe with the china bowl covered with verses in German about the soldier who would rather go to his girl than stand guard.

Stealthily Mother started clearing away the dishes.

And then the storm broke: "God damn this cleaning and cleaning, and then I'll have to help pay doctor bills. Let Uncle clean. He ain't put his fist to anything so long it'll drop off soon. Let him do a bit of work. It'll give him the muscles Jews ought to have!"

Uncle cringed, and his face turned white.

With a throaty exclamation, Aunty seized the dishpan.

"Again talking like you come from the high windows," cried Father, rising from his chair.

Quickly Mother caught hold of Jack's hands and drew him upstairs to the parlor. I retreated to my room, relieved that the quarrel had been cut short, but I could not do my lessons, and I struggled with my anxiety and fear, hoping against hope that something would happen soon to solve the terrible problem of Uncle Meyer and his family.

Towards morning we were awakened by the squalling of the baby. Then Bessie and Tessie started peeping while Judah crept around in his conductor's cap. "Next stop Cooney."

Uncle crouched on his bed, shaken by a horrible dream. "The peasants are dancing around me like a band of Tartars. They fall on me, rip off my head. Out comes blood bitter as gall."

Father tried to soothe him. "Don't think twice of it. In a dream you knock out whatever gives you heartache during the day. It pays to have dreams."

"But it is different when you are not wanted. It is different when you are spurned like dung."

In her shapeless nightgown, her arms crossed over her breasts, Aunty begged us tearfully to forgive her. "You crept with sound heads into a sick bed when you asked us to come here. Four children, and he can't earn a crumb of bread."

Jack strode from one end of our bedroom to the other, the fire in his pipe like the Cyclops' eye. "Won't work, won't let others sleep. To hell with it!"

Uncle turned white and fluttered his crumpled hands. "Where are our belongings?" He hastened to the basement and clattered back with his broken wicker trunk. "If not for those beasts, I could make a good expressman." He started stuffing pillows into the trunk.

Mother went to him. "Meyer, what are you doing?"

"I am not wanted. Every piece of bread is counted. A nephew to be that way, your own flesh and blood to blow up like a turkey with a straw on its nose. I will not stand for insults. Jews will not stand—"

"Let them sit!" shouted Jack.

Mother swayed. "My son, my son."

"No begging that lout." Father pushed her aside. "Once and for all, this is still my house. You will get out of here before any of these small fowl, you piece of filth."

Jack snatched up his cap and left the house.

Mother fainted. We had to carry her to her bed where she lay flattened out as if under a press. Uncle put the trunk back and hid in a corner moaning that he must never be the cause of his brother's child being driven from home. Aunty, who had her hands full quieting the terrified children, wept that everything must be done immediately to right the wrong. "After all, it is a hard-working young man. Is it so easy to earn a crust of bread in the world today? He must sleep, he must rest. We, we are to blame. You had no right." Picking at his beard angrily, Father turned on his heel and fled from her remonstrances.

There was no question now but that we would have to make impossible without delay a recurrence of the horror of that night. Peace would be ours only if Uncle were put to work. We must allow nothing to stand in the way of putting him on his feet, once and for all.

It was out of the question asking Jack to give a helping hand. He was earning good wages, but every cent he could spare was being put away to start his own machine shop. Father's ribbon and trimmings store wasn't doing well. Feeling that if we set Uncle up even in a modest way it would be the first good step, Mother gave him the money she had been saving for a coat, to which I added a couple of dollars I had managed to scrape

together for some books.

Uncle kissed her, crushed me to his bony chest, and prepared to become a business man in a realistic fashion. He rented a pushcart, with the declaration that it really was time to slip the yoke of no-work off his neck and make our eyes open in wonder. He bought cartons of balloons, toy canaries, whistles, little water boys who squirted a stream when their rubber hats were squeezed.

On my way from school I would stop off at his cart, where I found him singing his wares. With a wink at me, he trotted after a stout woman with kids clinging to her skirt, took her by the hand and rattled Russian at her until she turned and yielded. Face red from his exertions, he cried, "In the old country you take baths in a bathhouse, and you have a little besom to beat yourself. I said her children were sticking to her behind like leaves from the besoms. Jews can say anything to one another. Ach, children, what a happy world it would be if they let us live." He sighed and started singing a song for the other peddlers about "Die Deutschen mit die lange Beitchen," the Germans with the long whips.

Uncle worked with a will and business was good. Then winter came, the whole world seemed to lose interest in toys. Mother's illness and the awful quarrels had taught him a lesson, for the day after he had disposed of his last bit of stock, he hired out as a bottle washer in a junkshop. Here he worked in a steam-foggy cellar, his stomach rubbed raw from the tin tubs, his breath going like an old engine. This job lasted until the spring when he found a place in a delicatessen shop, where he prepared papers of mustard, made salads and sandwiches, and during the rush hours served at the tables.

"It is the best job I have had in years. Eighteen dollars a week with tips makes me feel like a Rothschild. But look, here is a boss, a redheaded one like a bedbug. I slice the corned beef too thick, I give customers too much bread on the plates. Don't they pay for it? But he, just because he owned a fruit store once and hired Italians who are thieves, must he treat me that way? And his wife! A tongue long as our exile, a real Empress Catherine."

"What has Catherine to do with it?" asked Jack.

"You don't know Catherine the Czarina?"

"Never had the pleasure."

"Jews should know their enemies. Once they found a Jewish soldier, strong as an ox, milk and blood, another Macabee. They brought him to her, that dissolute woman."

"So?"

"He was a good Jew, and Potemkin, her lover, he too hated us."

Jack yawned. "They brought her a horse once. That's why there are so many horses in Russia."

Uncle dared not complain again although the boss was a heartless person, who docked him for breaking a plate, docked him when a customer

palmed off on him a counterfeit dollar bill, and during rush hours terrorized not only Meyer, but also the Hungarian dishwasher. And when Meyer gashed his hand, the boss called him a fool and discharged him.

Uncle could not look for work until his hand had healed. To make himself useful, he offered to help Father in the store, shopped for Mother, assisted with the gardening. He accompanied me to the park to identify the trees and birds and visit the zoo, which was part of my biology work.

The waddle-legged geese cried, "Huncle, huncle," a loose rooster cocked his head, the wapiti stalked up with velvet on their horns to give us the once over.

"There's Ivan the thief." He squinted at the Russian bear, his face lighting up tenderly at meeting such an old friend. In the monkey house: "What little people they are. Tell me, my nephew, why are they always happy while we sit in tears?"

I did not know what to answer.

"You are a smart youngster. Tell your stupid uncle."

I gazed up at the pale screwed-up face. "They, too, have their sufferings."

He scratched his chin dubiously. "Have they? They aren't Jews. They don't have to go into a Christian world for bread."

We sat down in the grass.

"I will tell you. Maybe you can learn from your uncle," he said humbly. "In Russia there was no place for us. This you know. I went to England and couldn't earn enough bread to make a blessing over. I come to Canada. I worked in a mine of stones, quarry they call it. They acted like the worst pharaohs, the bosses. I run away. They shot guns at me because I broke their contract. Four days and nights I walked and hid from the people with the guns. I come to America and work in Chicago in the seltzer business with your aunt's brother. Soon mankind loses its taste for seltzer and dies for soda water. I come here, and again it is the same story. All I want is my wife and children should not go naked and hungry. For myself a piece of hard bread can be a feast if the soul is at peace. But no, they won't let us live!"

"Who, Uncle?"

"The goyim."

We sit and argue, and I try to show him he is wrong, that there are Irish and Italian boys in school with whom I am on good terms, that the faculty adviser of the chess club has warmly praised the Jewish players even though he is a Yankee.

"Oh, they must say we have the best brains. There is no head like a Jewish one. That is the reason they hate us. But grow up and you will see. You can't teach them. Teach a wolf, and he will run back to the forest." He blew his nose between his fingers. "Look how fat he is, a goitre." He smiled at the cock pigeon in the grass, and for a moment the age-old sorrow was forgotten.

Before Meyer's hand could heal, Aunty was caught again. This time the doctors warned her she would have to go through with it. Despite the warning, she took hot mustard baths, dosed herself with quinine, and Mother found her late one night jumping off the steps into the cellar.

Both women wept bitterly in each other's arms.

"It is a Jewish child. You must bring it into the world."

She had a severe confinement. Three days and nights she walked the floor. And then early one morning Uncle burst into our room, his eyes burning. "Born in a shirt! A little Messiah born in a shirt!"

His joy knew no bounds. The neighbors, the merchants on the block, and all the others who cared to listen were told again and again that a child born in a shirt means the greatest of all good fortune. "Let one Jew be happy, and all Jews feel it. Let one Jew fall, all Jews limp about with sticks. The world will turn into a Jerusalem, not a Russia. Do you know what a Russian did to us?"

He drew a deep breath. "A Russian nobleman took the Jewish girls from a village, shamed them all, and when they were about to have babies, he put them into a tree, yes, a tree like birds or pigeons, then he took his gun and shot them down."

A groan broke from him. "Thank the Lord God, my nephew, that you will never have to know what it is to have their spittle on your bread."

The baby was sickly. Its wailing penetrated every corner of the house. Doctor's bills mounted. Before a violent explosion could wreck everything, however, Uncle proposed a plan which promised us peace—he must be allowed to go to Palestine.

Hunting work, he had met a Jew who had run a poultry farm upstate, and was now looking for a partner to buy an orange grove near Jaffa. Palestine was the homeland of the Jews, and Jews should hive there. Did not the good Jew say after the holiest services, "Next year in Jerusalem"? Does not the psalm run, "If I forget thee, Oh Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning and the tongue cleave to my mouth"? And the dead, have they not the soil of the Land of our Forefathers put into their coffins?

He bought a chromo of Theodore Herzl, hung it up in his bedroom, and was always studying the imposing figure of the Zionist with the heart-shaped brow. Palestine was on his lips day and night. To be under his own tree with his three girls and the two circumcised ones! What a dolt he had been not to have understood that the gates of freedom lay there in Jerusalem.

Jack, who should have realized that here was the solution to our difficulties, had scant sympathy for the plan. Somewhat spitefully he countered, "Don't Palestine belong to the Arabs?"

"That's a lie!" shrieked Meyer.

Fortunately, Father was away in the synagogue. Mother ran into the room.

"What the hell difference does it make what they put on you—earth from Palestine or horse droppings? You're dead when you're dead."

The tears started in Uncle's eyes, he caught his head in his hands and sobbed out loud.

Gruffly Jack answered Mother's reproaches, loaded his pipe, and walked morosely in the garden.

Though Uncle was shaken by this cruel blast, within a week he brought up once more the subject of Palestine. Father examined his insurance policy and arranged to borrow on it. The new loan society of the synagogue let him have several hundred dollars. He wrote to the relatives in Chicago and pried something out of them. Taking a new lease on life, Uncle scurried around and found various odd jobs. At the end of the year we had got together enough for steamship tickets and for the partnership.

It was a fine sunny day when we went to see them off, the girls dressed in new clothes, the baby fast asleep, and Judah in his conductor's cap with the visor polished.

The bell clanged. The liner rang like a giant harmonica. Uncle kissed me for the last time. "You have grown like a dog since your stupid uncle came into your life." He pressed my head against his bony chest. "You will not forget this Jew, will you? And your prayers, your tphilin?"

I felt my nose pinch, my eyes blur.

"Goodbye, Cooney, Cooney Island."

The tiny tugs puffed and pulled, the liner edged away slowly, the three of us kept waving from the pier (Jack had said the hell he'd come) and then the dear faces seemed to be swept up into a monstrous dark fist and crushed into tears and smoke.

After the departure we were heavy-hearted. The first news from our travelers erased our fears. It was a card post-marked Naples. "Day and night my heart beats louder than this wonderful ship. It is a miracle what is happening to us. Your aunt's pains have all vanished, as if in the deep sea. The children are growing in the length and the breadth. You should see the little one! He is a hero. He will grow up and ride a white horse for us all . . . "

After the arrival in Palestine, we received a thick letter with photographs of the family as well as of the hatchet-faced partner and his wife; the faces were all touched up so that it looked as though grown-ups and children had been eating jam as they had sat for the photographer. "I can hardly hold a pen in my fist . . . The land is so rich, put a stick into the ground and it blooms quick as Moses made snakes out of wood. We go around smochkin oranges. My nephew, I will send you a little rooster and his wife. They will eat bugs off your flowers and raise a large family . . ."

Conscientiously Uncle kept sending us weekly letters. He went into rhapsodies about the sweet-scented groves, the communes with the great fields in which whole Egyptian armies could be lost. Ecstatically he discussed agriculture, machinery, irrigation, describing the pipes like fifes

through which the "Jewish rain" sang. "I could go on with these wonders a thousand-and-one nights. Ach, what is America? At last, the Jew rests. The wanderer has found his home."

I sit in our tiny bedroom trying to answer Uncle Meyer's last letter. It seems centuries ago that he left us, and misfortune after misfortune has dogged his steps. The first season the rains rotted the oranges. The partner and he had to give up the grove. They joined a settlement where a family had to sleep in one room, and the meals at best were a bowl of stew. After leaving the settlement, they went north to the dairy country. There the land was poor, and the partners had to separate, Uncle getting a job as hodcarrier in Haifa.

When the war broke out, we were without word from Uncle for almost a year. Mother became ill with worry. Finally a letter arrived telling us about Jews bombed in their quarters, slaughtered in the streets, mutilated on the roads. "The young man, I knew him well. Two drops of milk like our own Isaiah. They took him off the truck, those Arab bandits. This is our Holy Land!"

As I sit in my room reading the letter, in comes Jack. Wearily he flings himself in his greasy clothes on the bed, stuffs his strong tobacco into his pipe.

I pretend I am reading to myself: "Yes, my nephew, I miss you, my old philosoph. The Jew has no home, not even a stone for a pillow. Tell me why the flowers, the trees, the birds, why the bugs of the earth and all creatures have homes, but we Jews . . . ' "

"Sh--!" cries Jack. "Why did he run off and start up with those Arabs? Running from one country to another, his pants on fire, yelling about the goyim. Why the hell didn't he stay where he was born? Was he afraid he'd have to work? America ain't all roses, but catch me running away like a damned fool!"

There is enough truth in what Jack says to make it difficult to answer him—and he has become terribly hard and bitter. His plans to open his own place have come to nothing. He is the sole support of the family. Father's store is on its last legs, and every week through all sorts of subterfuges a little is taken out of his pay envelope to send to Palestine.

The key clicks in the hall. Father is returning from the synagogue. His shoulders are stooped. He moves into the kitchen with his Sabbath greetings, and Mother rises from her corner dimly lit with candles and answers him feebly.

The faces of my people remain before my eyes. I see the children, their mother, and my uncle. And it seems to me that Palestine was no solution: the old problem has been hurled back into our laps.

The smoke from Jack's military pipe fills the room. I stare at the letter, and my heart is heavy. What can I say to my Uncle Meyer?

# CLARK MILLS:
# *Seven Poems from* THE CIRCUS

## *The Approach*

The two dim, witless fellows near the highway
stared open-mouthed as we walked past them on our hands,
and watched our somersaults with eyes unblinking
and hair uncombed and arms as limp as rubber-bands.

And when we asked them for the sleeping wood
and where the hills of music huddled in the night
and if at evening we might hope to find
the slow unwinding stream of sensual delight,

those rocks alive said, Haw, spun on one foot,
and grinned at us and shrugged, and stared at one another
and looked us up and down, and in slow motion
clomped back into the hinterland, brother and brother.

## *The Prisoner*

Slave to his milieu, the chained chameleon
mimics a brooch, and from lapel and bosom
observes the beasts and the absurdities.

Keen on his cardboard as an open jack-knife,
docile amidst the ranks of his pied fellows,
all afternoon he waited to be sold;

and now in shadow of balloon and platform
he sees the world and cannot speak his terror
but plays his role: that of a jewel, living.

## *The Stilt-Walker*

in his fine coat of cinnamon and chocolate fur
stands with his two eyes in his belvedere
beneath a pair of horns of peach-down fuzz.

Beautiful when he wanders, with vast knees
unsteady as an adolescent's, or, as tall
as a brown legend from the looking-glass,

bends down from heaven, and down, and stares
deep into the darkness of your provinces
with no sound, and as if to kiss or whisper.

## *The Three Rings*

In the first ring the rites of blood proceed.
The faultless knife and the crusading bullet
plunge to their mark with perfect aim and speed,
and the shout rises, This is life, oh kill it!
In the third ring the thoughtless lovers lie
clean as the great beasts in their lack of shame:
Call me mirage, they cry. Say which is I.
Answer what I do not ask. Speak my name.

And solitary in the central ring
a blindfold figure, victim as well as judge,
stands vertical upon his razor-edge
and waits for his applause or the blind Thing.
The sphere of his perception flash and hover
till his performance and the world are over.

## *The Circle of Sleep*

Now Jack who braved the brutal kindness of the ogre
sleeps
And Jill whose glance delighted in her figure
sleeps
And the blind prophet and the cataleptic beggar
doze in the shadows
The beasts desire the green and moisture of an open summer
and the soft eyes of the giraffe stare into nothing

The tall man broken on the wheel of thought
sleeps
The woman bitter with complaint when she was caught
sleeps
And one who wept in private and another who was bought
stir in the darkness
The white disk of the moon desires the seas beyond the west

and the soft eyes of the giraffe stare into nothing

Who shouted all night in bars and fell and cracked his teeth
sleeps
Who drowned in the still water of his faith
sleeps
And the unhappy legend and the hollow myth
wander in stupor
The summer months desire the epoch of fruition
and the soft eyes of the giraffe stare into nothing

Who fled from the reality into the image
sleeps
Who moved from his perceptions towards the scent of homage
sleeps
Who lies like a wrecked ship and one who counts the damage
cry and are silent
The naked leaves desire the wind that moves beyond them
and the soft eyes of the giraffe stare into nothing

Now Jill outstretched beside the cotton-headed punster
sleeps
And Jack who lost his cowardice beneath the monster
sleeps
And the tired millionaire and the contented spinster
drift from their troubles
The waters of the sea desire the mild attraction of the moon
and the soft eyes of the giraffe stare into nothing

The meadow that was loud with hound and hunter
sleeps
And in the meadow the barred cage that none must enter
sleeps
And the dim vault of canvas with the barred cage at the center
sinks from the light
The winds desire an open path for their nostalgia
and the soft eyes of the giraffe stare into nothing

## *The Conspirators*

One came over the rotten wharves, one crossed
by ferry, and one climbed through the long sewer,
one came by taxicab, and one was lost,
the lunatics whose purposes were pure.

And one whose simple weapons were her sex
and her low voice, an orchidaceous blonde,
entered the circle of the ghosts and wrecks
and stared into her golden hate beyond.

Wind wandered the night. The others slept
—lemur and lion-tamer, stork and clown—
while these crouched over secrets to be kept,
perfecting the destruction of the town.

Their passion was transmuted into logic.
The whispered plan, the lucid wish to harm,
the hope they might succeed as if by magic
and sow complete disorder and alarm

hovered above the five heads in the night
solid as legend or a law imposed,
kindled their eyes to fury and delight,
stirred in their clenched hands, as the others dozed.

## *Not Far from There,*

over the roofless homes and skulls, a balm
and a soft halo of transfiguration,
the mild light of the faultless disk
drenches the air. Below, the lost equipment
melts in the rust and moisture: helmets,
rifles, mortars, uniforms, bone, and rifles
accord themselves with one another and the ensemble.
The mild light is responsible. The faultless disk
rides high.

The spilled pools
glistened all afternoon, hot bronze
with yellow highlights. Now in the white night
are colorless as tarnished silver. And from the horizon
rises as always
the idiot chatter of the sightless guns.

# ROBERT FITZGERALD:
## *Cobb Would Have Caught It*

In sunburnt parks where Sundays lie,
Or the wide wastes beyond the cities,
Teams in grey deploy the sunlight.

Talk it up, boys, a little practice.

Coming in stubby and fast, the baseman
Gathers a grounder in fat green grass,
Picks it stinging and clipped as wit
Into the leather: a swinging step
Wings it deadeye down to first.
Smack. Oh, attaboy, attyoldboy.

Catcher reverses his cap, pulls down
Sweaty casque, and squats in the dust;
Pitcher rubs new ball on his pants;
Chewing, puts a jet behind him;
Nods past batter, taking his time.
Batter settles, tugs at his cap.
A spinning ball: step and swing to it,
Caught like a cheek before it ducks
By shivery hickory: socko, baby:
Cleats dig into dust. Outfielder
On his way, looking over shoulder,
Makes it a triple. A long peg home.

Innings and afternoons. Fly lost in sunset.
Throwing arm gone bad. There's your old ball game.
Cool reek of the field. Reek of companions.

# GENE DERWOOD:

## *N. B. Symmetrians*

We the symmetrians seek justice here
And asymmetric nature makes a drought.
We wrap up hand-outs for the martyred poor
Making sure to put in books and tin-can beer,
Each man relieved goes home and gives a clout
To mrs. man or pal-man and slams the door.

The speechful day in knowing languors goes,
We seek again for salt and summer sky,
The pure-blue meteor flares and falls unburnt,
We take to our heels standing on staunch tiptoes.
We read half-works of science for the why
And scheme to balance marxly with what's learnt.

Fastened and fasting in the bed-rock man,
The assainted snuffed-down halo strives to rise,
The unstabilized land still slips up out of ocean,
Bears odd imperilled flora built to plan.
A natural start is now no one's surmise,
To take things as presented no one's notion.

They used to start afresh but we try burdened
Trimming the present's future with the past.
It's all the fault of inter-communication,
Mountains of dove-tailed pebbles and words wordened.
The newest prism is moulded from the last,
The simplest thing is: to laud the massive nation.

The moon still shines beside the daytime star,
The waters weave, rain cools, dunes move, grain grows,
Soft words bring soft replies, muscles expand,
Whether we say the stars are far or near
The polar lights still paint the glacier floes,
The temperate zones are yet more fully manned.

# DAVID CORNEL De JONG:

## *How the Watchers Have Soured*

From cool necromancy of no sound and
almost night the men rose. They went like
banners at a victory imagined with the mind
lost in another day's detriment. But they
marched, treading upon the music they made,
leaving behind only Moloch standing on the dam
holding a woman's hand and murmuring fears.

Still there is no night. Out of the drooped sounds
lizards crawl and rustle. Still there is no word
spoken between the watchers and love. All the trees
are a gesture for madness, and all the birds
rest their breasts on breast-mirroring lakes.
Lost are the men, gone is the god, and the woman
spreads her ripe-wheat hair like a net
to catch impossibly innocence or error.

Let us go home and part our cold knees
to the fire. Let us confess loneliness while
our hearts singe and our minds smoke brown,
shifting the lacquered eyes like checker pieces,
unscrewing the ears like glutted bassoons,
now that all we have watched is a harvest fenced
in gilded spiders frozen by last year's snows.

## *Just a Song at Twilight*

On the fence a febrile titmouse could
sing anger unto any cat. The flies
upon the checkered tablecloth may reach
a destination, or desist . . . and all is lost.

One army drowned between vineyards and
another in a winepress stamped to blood.
Lift up the spoon, let fall the fork
and notice bony footprints in the pudding sauce.

If possible at once accept life whereof
dismemberment and rot become the crowns,
learning the trademarks of wounds and the tunes
that hunger can play on the harp of the ribs.

Forgetting the grief of birds dying and
cats getting lost, and flies winging to decay,
so men spilling their bones may be
our pert companions to answer our jokes.

There remains the hint still scribbled here
by someone also cursed with life: Listen,
if you care to die, phone us, but hide
the precious secret of death from the crowd.

## *Bennebroek, Holland . . .*

We came by train, horizontal, yet upinthesky
it seemed, uplifted from the meadows. We
to see the Dutch being clean and plain-
minded, but instead it rained: a grievous rain.

A statue stood in a park, jabbing the rain.
A statesman it said, with a deed he did.
But we were sad, and rubbed our knees
hearing bells just edged enough with pain
to make us think of Clara, when one spring,
when we were young and she sat on a swing
and we pushed, and she was cute—but we no good
thinking thoughts like that about a kid so good.

It rained as if Adeste Fidelis were being sung
by Schumann-Heink on a red-seal record while
the lights are low. It rained. And listening long
I remembered how it was when little Grandma
told me that the clouds were the white souls of
the dear departed, washed clean by God . . .
"Hear that bell? It makes you long for home."

We went back by train, but our feet were wet.
The Dutch were domestic and private, but the rain
was anybody's name. There was a war on, and
a dread of scolding anything besides the bitter rain.

# JEAN GARRIGUE:
## *With Glaze of Tears*

With glaze of tears or of
Madness, our eyelids winged
The land: tall clouds reflected
Upon us, grass blowing in
Glint of cloud, weird rock, scene of
Our meetings, pathways around
The fen.
Looking into this lucid
Scene flowing beneath us, sight
Dimmed; as if the synapses
Splintered, sight darkened and failed.
For our landscape of love was
Neither each other's features
Since we were each other, but
Rich and violent country.
It was our love's and our
Soul's figuration. Now,
To stand in this separation
From cloud and flower of our kin,
Now in our seeing to close out
All spaces our eyes had run,
To know this land was symbol,
Ethereal, which had fed our veins,
Was ailing of being, was staring
To breathe flower's air or
Flower of us? Confusion trebled.
Leaping and leaping our hearts,
Sight staggered; if landscape was
Different than we, so were we,
So were we, falling, ourselves from
The world cut off, emblem of love
Torn in two.

# SAMUEL FRENCH MORSE:
## *Alexander Wilson: The Birds*

I

I stand in this wide place to watch the birds
In scattered flight against the August haze,
Chancing a fame I cannot comprehend,
Pursued too long, uneasy at the storm;

And resting here alone until the darkness
Rolls from the east, to watch, and to recall
How time destroys no madness but the heart's,
I see the after-image of my words

Portentous as the stars above the light.
The swallows ruddy as the summer air,
The windless movement of the yellow grass,
These are my own identity and name.

That winter when I journeyed south, I saw
The vast forests where the sunlight falls
A hundred feet to smoulder in the damp,
Burning the years away; and in the dawn,

I heard the wild laughter of the pioneers.
I met them near Green River, going west.
The black earth lay to westward, with the sun;
They said there was no land where I was going.

But in the fields I found their wagon-tracks
Deep in the soil beside a clouded spring.
I saw the cabins where those dreamers tossed.
Unheard, their voices echoed down the air.

And in the wilderness, as spring came on,
I took my ease, waiting for the birds:
The yellowthroat, the jay, the hermit-thrush
Whose perfect flight eludes the dreaming eye.

II

The yellow wine has filled the long-stemmed glass,
And kindness and civility have matched
The midnight talk with strangers in a room
Where brandy set us wandering from the facts.

In Mr. Bartram's house, I thought of birds
Strange as the scarlet pheasants on the plates,
Their wings like fire against the brilliant glaze.
I heard the nightmare darkness of their flight.

In that great house I wrote the measured words,
And learned to trust the mockery of friends
More than the praise I could not understand.
They watched me earn the bitterness of fame:

Lawson, whose subtle fury got my pride,
Bradford, saying the books would cost too much,
Miller, and Ord whom I distrust for all
The favors he has done. At best they are

The gestures stiff with envy of my name.
At best the narrow smile turns on itself,
The shameful sneer, contemptible at last.
The shrike destroys too boldly to escape

The raging condemnation of its skill.
And in that house I learned the cost of sleep.
I watched the seasons alter from my room;
I heard the sora driven by the hawk.

III

Now, from this hill, I see a final north
Where storms have split the vaunt these oaks had made
Against the sun. The ferns are withered here.
The rosy tangles of the dogbane creep.

I fear the savage loneliness of days,
I take no reckoning against the stars
That I have seen above the wilderness,
Turning across the distances I came.

I have no choice but hatred for those friends
Who seek the superscription of my praise.
Tonight, Ord leaves for Boston, Lawson asks
Payment in full for work well done and loved.

I knew what Lawson's price would be that night
At Mr. Bartram's—letters of a name
Elaborate with fancy on the page.
These are my friends. Surely they know my ways.

But now the slow silence of the afternoon
Preys on the mind. Midsummer, and the dust
Settling thick on the dark leaves of the oak.
There is no wind. None, the leaves are dry.

From here I cannot see the house, the trees
Have grown so high they shut the long view out
Across the gap. Southward, southwest, I see
Only the apparition of the sun.

I know the calenture that takes the mind
Like the quick poison of the copperhead,
To gnaw the reason from the living bone.
The goldenrod turns brown, and goes to seed.

Here, on this hill I wait alone to find
The solitude that fame cannot destroy.
Here I remember nothing but the birds
Rising like shadows through the summer air.

# HANS OTTO STORM:

## *The Little Plant*

In Clyde Kannidy's room there was a very small table and a straight-back chair and a narrow cot made of links of iron wire. It was a little like a jail, but he did not think of that. There was also a picture of two deer, framed with a glass which made their horns look wobbly.

Outside of his window, bottles sometimes dropped from two or three stories higher to a place in the court where a garbage can was supposed to stand. Outside of his window was the city, and Clyde Kannidy had never been introduced to it. He was a country boy and afraid, though not afraid of any one particular thing.

He was learning to be a plumber, and there was a rule in the trade that you had to go to a different town; that was how he had come to the city, which he was afraid of. During the day he worked in a new, many-storied office building. It was not the biggest nor the finest office building in the city, and yet there was more marble in the toilets than in all the Oystermen's Hotel back home. He was afraid of that too, for some reason. During the day he chipped on beautiful tile floors and screwed on nickel plated pipes and was very quiet. "What's the matter with that helper of yours, he don't ever say anything?" they asked his boss. "Thank Christ he don't," said the journeyman. "You fellows bullin' all the time, ain't it enough?' Some of the plumbers talked of sinful things and some of the plumbers talked of homey things, but in the evening Clyde did not go to where either of these could be found; he went to his bare room.

He did not so much mind the bareness. Back home there had been many brothers and sisters and the most he had ever had to himself was a screen porch. He had hardly *been* himself even. Once he'd started to build a boat and it had been so stubby and awkward that people laughed at it and said it would never swim, and some people had said it looked just like Clyde. Then one of the little brothers had got into his tools and bored a hole in the boat and he had just let it stand, so that it gradually got covered over with other junk. He hadn't been angry with the little brother, he knew that was the way kids were. And he didn't want anything much for himself now and he didn't think about the bare room. He did wish sometimes that he could have a dog.

Saturday afternoon the janitor came clattering down the dim hall, leaning his brooms and mops against the wall of Clyde's door. He came in and made some ceremonial flourishes and Clyde stepped out of the door to get out of his way.

"What's that?" he said.

It was a red-earth flowerpot, and in it was a stunted little plant with

one red berry. "Old maid in one of the street rooms threw it out," said the janitor. "It's no good. Lemme go through and see if I can hit that ash can with it. Watch." He took the little plant and made for Clyde's window.

"Hey, don't do that!"

"It's no good. Why, do you want it?"

"Well if nobody else don't want it—hell!"

"Okay. Save me packing it out."

With a surly kind of possessiveness Clyde took up the little plant and set it on his bare table, and the janitor went on down the hall.

Clyde looked at the little plant. It was sickly, but maybe if you'd water it a little . . . He didn't know what kind of a plant it was, what you'd call it. His mother had always had lots of plants around the place—the screen porch where he had lived was full of them—but he'd never paid any attention. It just occurred to him now that they had belonged there. Why, they were pretty; they made a place different. He took the thick tumbler which was his only piece of bric-a-brac and went down the long hall to the bathroom and drew water from the washstand which was so different from those in the new shiny office building and came back and poured it carefully around the little plant. The dry earth crackled.

If he had been a brighter boy Clyde would have felt just a little foolish, but he wasn't bright. He came home and studied the little plant carefully—the horny green stem which came out of the earth and divided into two and then three green stems, the little leaves with their complicated structure, and the one red berry. He took out his pocket knife and loosened the hard dirt around the stem. "Plowing," he thought. "Cultivating!" And he laughed to himself. Why you know, he thought next, you could have something; a fellow ought to have *something* he could fuss around, like when he'd started to build the boat. Even in a city.

Each morning and evening he put water around the little plant, all the water that the pot would hold. "You're givin' that thing too much water," said the janitor. "You'll drown it." That was an idea; plants didn't want *too* much water. But the leaves were freshening up again; it was sending out one of those things—shoots, they called them. Why, it was growing!

A fellow ought to have a few things; be a person. At home there had always been too many brothers and sisters and he'd felt like a number. And in the city he'd felt like a number, afraid for some reason to talk to the plumbers; but you didn't have to feel that way. You could be someone, have something once in a while. He'd liked to have had a dog; anyway he could have a little plant. "You're looney about that little plant," the janitor said to him. "You can get 'em better than that for fify cents at any nursery." "Aw," said Clyde. Maybe he was looney about it but what the hell business was that of the janitor's? It was his little plant.

Sure he was looney about it. The red berry dropped off—it had simply got through its berrying—and Clyde wondered if the seed would grow.

Most probably not; probably plants like that were he- and she-ones, and you couldn't expect it to sprout seeds all by itself. A lonely possessiveness welled up in him around the notion. He covered the red berry with earth; it might do for fertilizer. Sure, that's what plants needed. Now he was working in the wholesale district in a place where there were horses, and he plotted carefully to take his lunch in a stiff paper sack and to bring the sack back home with him at night. "You're nuts," the janitor said. "All right," said Clyde with a real self-assurance, and he didn't care. There were weeds around the little plant after that and he pulled them out; cute little things in their first leaf, but that wouldn't do. He was taking care of that little plant; he was going to have more little plants from the nursery, only he didn't know the names of any plants and didn't like to ask. He would though, later. You could have a whole row of them; buy them for fifty cents, small, and make something out of them. He looked at the city through the window—looked at it figuratively, it was around the corner of the light-shaft—and the city, figuratively, didn't scare him any more. The plumbers didn't. "I worked in a place like this back up in Oysterton," he said next day. "A old Dutchman ran it, and he used to—" The plumbers turned around and listened to him and winked at each other. "Say what's happened to that helper of yours?" they asked the journeyman. "Why, he can talk! Something sure hit him." "Must be in love," said a fatherly, decent-looking man of fifty, and Clyde heard him.

Clyde wasn't bright, and even the most natural ideas had to be started in his head and pushed a bit. Being in love was something he didn't know very much about, but he was open-minded. Two mornings later, having had time to think over the four words and over the solid standing of the man that spoke them, he walked into the coffee shop alone. The girl who had brought him his breakfast for four weeks now stood behind the counter and was cupping her hand over her mouth in a yawn. "Excuse me," she said, and smiled. "Guess I'd better go to bed at night, I'm not awake yet." Clyde grinned. 'What'll you have, the same?" "Hot cakes and sausage," he said. "And a cup of coffee." Gradually it came into his head that she'd spoken to him.

He ate his hotcakes and sausage as thoughtfully as he had cultivated the earth around his little plant. Then, as she came by:

"Betty," he said, "can I have another coffee?"

The girls had names stitched on their smocks in cotton yarn much scuffed with laundering, and that invited you to call them by their names if you so chose, but Clyde blushed from ear to ear when he found that his own voice had actually taken up the plot. And she stopped when he spoke, and had heard him, however ordinary it might sound. "Sure thing," she said heartily, and brought the coffee. "Thanks," he said.

He didn't go to the same restaurant that night, he had to have time to think it over. But he went there for breakfast the next day. It wasn't the kind of a place where the waitresses are trained to say "Good morning,"

but if you were a repeat customer sometimes they said "Hello" on their own account. "Hello," she said.

"Hello, are you up for all day?" he said, and surprised himself.

It was exhilarating to be able to talk to a girl like that; a city girl. At home he'd had a lot of sisters. The girls he had known to talk to were all too much like sisters; they knew you from knee-pants days and knew you too well and there was always someone to cut in and give you away even more. But she didn't know him at all and it was a new thing. At first she'd scared him the way the city scared him, but now she didn't scare him any more—not quite—and that was just what was nice about it. He watched her little feet in open-toed shoes tripping in and out of the kitchen and the strong calves of her legs and just think, he could talk to her.

He did talk to her, the same things over and over mostly; it wasn't the talking you did, but the way you stopped when you talked and noticed each other. He made it a point one day to come very late for his supper, afraid he'd miss it and be too late, and he killed time with his food till the place got the dishy sound of being ready to close up and then he said to her, "How about going to a show or something?" He didn't do all that on the first day; it took time. And it was very nice, and when he left her at home that evening he said, just as he'd done when he asked for the other cup of coffee, "Can I kiss you, Betty?" And she said, "Of course, silly—do you know how?" It was good to be alone after that in the night, and to think over everything slowly, bit by bit. He didn't run away from her that time though; he came back for his breakfast in the morning. He was there at the lunch-counter and she yawned again, and laughed. "Why don't you go to sleep in the night," he said to her, "'stead of chasing around till all hours with a feller?" He wasn't bright, and one joke had to stand quite a bit of service.

After that, though, life roared along for him, even if some people would have called their little bantering love affair a very tame one. She wasn't Venus; she was a freckle-faced girl with plump cheeks and rather deep-set eyes behind them, and brindle-colored hair and small, muscular forearms used to lifting heavy dishes; but then, she was the one who was giving him the revelation. To have never known her before, and to have her come that way to him through the frightening city from an infinite distance, and to find out, without any help from anywhere, that she was desirable, that was the thing which was astonishing and beautiful.

He was surprised that he could go right on screwing up pipes in the daytime and have any force left for such work or know what he was doing —or he would have been surprised if he had thought very much about it. Actually he took to changes in life-habits stolidly. Going to school in the first grade was a revolution, but it was the same for all the kids at once so they didn't talk about it; going to work at a trade was a change but it was normal; being in love like this and drawing on the stored-up meat of

his nineteen years for living double speed was certainly different from anything he'd known, but it was the thing that was happening now. And it was pleasant.

He kissed her furtively in the too-narrow entrance of the place she lived in, and there were people coming and he turned to go. "Don't," she said. And so he went upstairs and saw where she lived. It was a gray little room not much better than his own for comfort, but it wasn't bleak. She'd done something to it, he didn't notice exactly what—a little arrangement of things, a few fussy souvenirs that looked homelike to him, and—why, she had plants. A couple of ferns in the window, very green and feathery. They made him half think of something and he stopped and stared.

"Well?" she said to him. "Dreamy!"

With a gasp of delight he understood he didn't have to go.

Not then. But all nights end, and Clyde thought of one thing at a time. They hadn't slept, not at all, and it was going to be morning.

"You'll have to get out of here before the gang gets up," she said. "But I don't want you to go."

He kissed her and sat up and stretched himself. The bed was cramped and he'd been lying on the iron edge.

"Clyde—" she said.

"Mmm?"

"We're going to get married and everything, aren't we?"

Not being bright has its points; things do not sound sordid. "Sure," he answered her, and meant it. He hadn't particularly thought that far into the future, but now she put the idea in his head and pushed it. It was pleasant.

Streetcars weren't running, and he was really glad they weren't. There was a whole lot to think about. He walked many blocks through the city which had scared him, which still scared him. He thought it over slowly, beginning with memory, getting adjusted to the belief that what had happened really happened, thinking as well as he could of the time ahead, how it would be different. Say, it *was* different, things were different right now. Tired, his heels striking the cement emptily, he wondered if there was anything he'd lose. No, he couldn't think of anything he'd lose. Funny idea; Betty was going to marry him and she'd be there all the time with him and he not even have to make a date; how could you think of anything you'd lose?

It was beginning to be an unpleasant city daylight. The whole experience to now had been to him like something large he could just barely lift; trying to think how things would be different in the future scared him. He was very tired—tired from working all day and from making love all night and from walking long blocks and from thinking, but especially from thinking. He went up the stairs; why he even had to try to remember what floor he lived on. Betty. Betty was wonderful. What kind of a girl was

she, anyway? His kind of a girl. They were a lot alike, the two of them, weren't they? Talked the same way—didn't talk much really; kidded each other, that was all—but liked it, lived in the same kind of a place, almost—he'd forgot to ask her if she'd like a dog. She liked little plants, she had those ferns, and the janitor told him he was looney about a little plant. Why—why, he hadn't thought about the little plant for weeks!

It was dead. Clear dead, shrivelled and falling apart like a thrown-away Christmas tree in its little restricted desert of an earthen pot. And he had been there all the time, going in and out . . .

It was time for him to feel a little sick anyway. And he couldn't understand. Why, you could buy them for fifty cents in any nursery; what was there about it? Why, he had Betty; they were going to be married and they were going to get out of this city the first time he saw his chance and they were going to have a house and a dog; what did he feel so funny for about a little plant? Oh, just the idea of it perhaps—getting so looney about a little thing and then not thinking of it all any more, walking right by it day after day. For the first time change didn't seem normal to him, and automatic.

# WILLIAM MARCH:
# *Four Fables*

## *The King and His Successors*

He was childless and he was getting old, so the King of the Wittins, wanting a successor whom he considered as wise and as well-informed as himself, thought of a simple test which would settle the matter. In his childhood the king had been taken on a visit to a foreign country, and there he had seen a monkey. He had watched the antics of the little animal with complete absorption, and the memory of that delightful experience had remained with him all his life. Now, in his old age, he determined to ask the various contenders for the throne what a monkey was, determining in this way their learning and general experience.

One by one the contenders came before the king for examination, and each defined a monkey as best he could, telling of its habits, its relationship to other animals, and, on one occasion, even its skeleton and nervous system. But at the end the king invariably sighed and said that they had all failed.

After awhile he turned to an old servant. "It's enough to make you mistrust education, isn't it?" he asked sadly. "These men I've examined are said to be the best informed in the kingdom, and yet not one of them knows what a monkey is."

One of the court slaves, who came from the same foreign country which the king had visited as a boy, spoke up. "I know what a monkey is. As a boy, back home, I saw them in the streets every day."

"Yes," said the king eagerly. "Go on. Tell these people what a monkey is."

"Why, a monkey, as I thought everybody knew, is a small, furry animal in a red coat who wears a cocked hat with a feather in it and turns handsprings after he picks up a coin you toss to him."

"'Of course!" said the delighted king. Then he turned to his ministers. "Go tell the people that this slave shall be my heir and my successor, for he's the only man I have found who is wise enough to rule over you."

## *The Screech Owl and the Farmer*

A screech owl, just learning to talk, flew into a tree to practice the one word that he knew, a word which his mother had taught him only that morning. He seated himself on a limb, arranged his feathers to his satisfaction and erected his ear tufts earnestly, but before he had a chance to open his mouth, a farmer who was ploughing in the field below him pulled

up his team, took off his hat, and scratched his head uncertainly.

"I declare," said the farmer to himself. "I do believe I made a mistake in planting all corn again. My brother-in-law told me to put in oats."

"Who?" said the little screech owl in a small, quavering voice.

The farmer turned around, but not seeing anybody, he came to the conclusion that some stranger was sitting in the tree to his left, hidden by the thick foliage. "My brother-in-law," he replied. "He lives down the road a piece. He's a great one for oats as against corn."

"Who? Who?" asked the little owl in his best bass register, and this time he managed to put a world of contempt into the falling inflection of the word. "Who?" he said again disdainfully; and then, as if running up and down a scale, he repeated, "Wh-o-o? Wh-o-o?" as though he were laughing at the farmer, his brother-in-law, and their pretensions.

The farmer left his team and came to the fence. He broke a club from a dead apple tree and balanced it in his hands. "I don't like your manners, stranger," he said angrily; "and unless you can give me more civil answers in future, somebody is going to get his head knocked off." The farmer waited, swinging his stick, and then the young screech owl, getting more and more sure of himself, straightened up, lifted his neck and shouted loudly in his shrillest, most penetrating voice: "Wh-o-o-o? Wh-o-o-o?"

"You, that's who!" said the enraged farmer. He hurled his club into the tree, in the direction of the voice, and the surprised little owl was knocked almost off his perch. Then, when he saw that the farmer was breaking another limb from the apple tree, he gathered himself together and flew back to his mother as quickly as he could manage it, having learned, without the loss of too many feathers, the fate of little boys who delight in asking questions merely for the pleasure of hearing themselves talk.

## *The Young Poet and the Worm*

A young Wittin poet stood one morning beside a river bank and looked at the wide, fruitful world about him. It was summer, and the countryside was lush and green. Fruit ripened in the orchards, cattle slept in the meadows of pink and white clover, and the yellow grain waved lazily and ripened in the fields.

The young poet stood spellbound for a time, thinking how greatly God had blessed mankind, and with what varied and abundant gifts; and then, overcome with emotion, he spoke passionately: "How beautiful and how rich the world is! How splendid! How varied! Only a fool would deny his divinity when he looks about him, as I am doing at this moment, and sees the perfection of a world created by God for man's pleasure!"

A worm who had crawled out of the earth listened with some astonishment to the young poet's impassioned words, staring hungrily at his pink, plump body. "It may be that the perfection of the world was made for the

pleasure of man, as you say," said the worm. "I don't know about that. But there's one thing I do know of my own knowledge, and it is this: The perfection of man was assuredly made for the pleasure of worms."

## *The Stableboy*

A stableboy who worked for a farmer in the provinces had one great ambition, and that was to go to court and learn how to become a gentleman. For this reason, he saved all his wages, denying himself everything which a young man has a right to expect, hoping someday that his ambition would be realized. One of the grooms had been in the capital when he was younger, and although he had never been at court, he had often seen the fine ladies and gentlemen going about in the city, and he had many tales to tell about their clothes, their refinements, and their delicate manners.

When the stableboy learned that the old groom had actually seen these wonderful things, he confessed his ambition. "Do you think I could ever be a gentleman?" he asked anxiously. The old groom looked at his friend's rough hands and coarse clothing and shook his head doubtfully.

"If I studied dancing and deportment and learned how to write verses, do you think I could?"

"I won't say it's impossible," said the old groom. "I wouldn't like to go that far."

And so things went on for some months, while the stableboy's savings grew with the passing of the weeks; and then, when his ambition seemed certain of fulfillment, he got a letter from his brother, who ran a farm not far away. The brother explained that he'd been sick for a long time, and since he hadn't been able to work, his family was in want; he begged the stableboy to send them what money he could spare.

The stableboy read the letter to the old groom. The groom said: "Tell your brother no. Tell him that you need the money for yourself." The stableboy shook his head regretfully. "That would be selfish, and it would hurt his feelings. I couldn't do anything that mean."

"Then tell your brother that you haven't got any money," said the groom. "He'll never know the difference, will he?" The stableboy looked hopeful for a moment and then his face fell. "That would be a lie," he said. 'I don't think I'd want to do it."

The next day he sent his savings to his brother. "I'm still young," he thought. "My trip is only put off a little while." He began to save his money once more, but hardly was the month out before news came of his brother's death. He had left a widow and six small children, and nothing else, and the widow implored her brother-in-law to come at once and take over the farm and work it in her husband's stead. This was the last thing in the world the stableboy had counted on, and he came to the far end of the

stable and stood there for a long time, making his decision.

The old groom came up, and being told of the new situation, asked the boy what he intended to do. "What else can I do, except go?" asked the stableboy. "Without a man to run the farm and look after them, they'd starve to death before the winter is over."

"If you go, you'll never get to court," said the old groom. "You'll have a lifetime job on your hands raising three children."

"I know," said the stableboy sighing deeply, "but it's my duty and I must manage the best I can." He sat down on an upturned wheelbarrow, picked up a straw and chewed it regretfully. "Maybe it won't be so hard," he said after a moment, "once I get used to the fact that I will never be a gentleman."

# GENEVIEVE TAGGARD:

## *The Discipline*

*"I bury my bones in the future"*

Comes now the great fear of death
Head and shoulders up from horizon,
Terminal tunnel that sucks down many
On wheels of smaller fear.
All on the highway at last,
The artery, the main,
Deep wind tense, going down.

Now is the time to take off,
This limit leaving
After long discipline:
Bold integer, in passion true;
And ecstasy lifts gently off, rises, goes
On. Past terror and tunnel.
The new zone, the next now, beyond.

So great death, meet thee mid-air
By ecstasy attended,
Pivot of joy pointed
On. Where no fear-shadow falls.
Clears over ground and tunnel head,
All stress and quiet height.
There, there alight. Now to die.

# MARJORIE BRACE:
## *The Case of Julian Green*

Despite Julian Green's immense prestige in the intellectual life of Paris, where he was rated among the major writers, American reviewers have done little more for him than to note with perennial surprise that, American-born, he chooses to write in French. It is probably too much, in a period when, under the slogan, "the dignity of the individual spirit," most novelists are engaged in documenting panoramic scenes with all the finesse of butchers hacking apart a carcass, to ask attention for the minutely dissective, operating under severely imposed limitations, even if the work is done in a style so flexible, so controlled, so individual that it emerges from the hands of a half dozen different translators with its distinctive nature undiminished.

For over ten years our criticism has been afflicted with a sham-Marxist notion that a writer is to be evaluated according to his conscious attitudes, and Green's have not been fashionable ones. In addition, his work is alien to the cheap tradition that literary mysticism and reactionary moralizing are synonymous. His superficial resemblances are many: in subject matter to Poe, Hawthorne, the French symbolists; in aesthetic philosophy to Flaubert and Henry James. But Green is neither a mystic nor a reactionary, nor is he as remote from the contemporary scene as those who ignore him assume: he is completely of the present, and his limitations are modern ones. Where James confined himself to the delineation of a narrow social class, Green concentrates on a psychological, a *medical* one. His subject is the neurotic, and the peculiarly and distinctively neurotic personality of our time.

From this stem all the characteristics of his work: the apparent intimacy, the withdrawn harrowing preoccupation with inner existence, combined with a rigorous dispassion, a monotonous spectral unreality. The people in his books present themselves impersonally to the reader, not because they are "types," but because they are *cases,* alienated from themselves even as they act out their deepest fears or desires. The absurdly melodramatic and violent plots through which they struggle, all those murders, incests, monumental melancholies, impossible, extravagant quests and ambiguities, these define the world of fantasy the neurotic inhabits. But the core of the problem is always the central one of our time: the increasing suppression and loneliness of the individual, and the lack of any embracing social meaning which might give stability to his life.

Ostensibly, it is true that the definite neurotic has exiled himself, or has chosen deliberately to be walled up in the fanatic solitude of his *Closed Garden;* that it is cowardice alone which makes him unable to do more than

wander terrified and fascinated along the banks of the *Strange River* of real life; and that no push from his fellow beings sends him along the career of madness in his *Dark Journey*. Green is not the kind of artist who pauses to draw obvious parallels between fascism and the death impulse, or to give statistics about the increasing incidence of mental disease and its sociological causation. He works from the inside, and this is the measure at once of his success and his failure. His best book, *The Strange River*, profits by its reference to easily observed social phenomena: the protagonist is weak, fearful, and ultimately spiritually dead because he is insulated from reality by unearned income; his sister-in-law pursues her curious affair with a lover whose sole attraction is poverty and danger in a distorted effort to escape her own haunted safety. (In its odd way, this is a completely Marxist novel, although one imagines that whatever social opinions Green may have would place emphasis upon the possibility of developing in man new and more profound perceptions and desires.)

Nevertheless, as with most writers, his weakness is inextricably entwined with his strength: if, as author, his position is rather like that favorite movie character, the mad psychiatrist, it is precisely this which contributes to the compulsive, thrilling, evocative quality of his style—a style which achieves effects akin to those usually obtained only in painting, in which physical objects, rather than actions or thoughts, take on a super-real vividness of being. Such a style derives not from sensuousness, nor any Van Gogh animism, but from the conditions of neurosis, in which, as in dreams, emotions are not aroused by objects, but objects themselves appear to be created by states of terror or passion. Thus, in *The Dark Journey*, the piercingly sinister moonlit coal-yard in which the murderer finds himself shut is a symbolization of the black, cold deadness of moral isolation. Similarly, the dilemmas of Green's characters are plausible and inescapable just because the world outside no longer exists for them, or acts upon them only in an inimical sense. I would suggest that such popularity as Green has is among readers who are uncommonly sensitive to the values of painting or who find their own inner disturbance mirrored in the clinical exactitude of his reportage.

*Then Shall the Dust Return*, his most recent novel (spring, 1941), is unsuccessful because it makes an effort to solve those problems which Green has hitherto been content to describe, and here the author's over-involvement makes failure inevitable. Neurotic solutions are always ineffectual since at any cost they must evade the major issue. The dream-sleep motif which pervades all the books, representing the only world in which the neurotic can both admit his desires and achieve the abandonment of self for which he secretly longs, has here been elevated into a philosophy, a belief in palingenesis achieved through the apparatus of dream. "Dreams are in fact merely fragments of a long message which never reaches us in its entirety"; if the fragments could be patched together we should find the answer to the "incompleteness" of our lives. Yet even as he traces the

dreams which link together and make into a whole a group of persons existing in three separate stages of history, Green wanders off into infinite obscure by-paths: the instrument of realization is to be religion, or "love" (that bodiless spiritual love which neurotics, all miniature Dostoievskys, exalt because they are forever incapable of feeling it), or the veneration of art. Green is never a convincing devotee of any of these avenues of evasion, not even of the Flaubertian aesthetic piety. In his journal, he has stressed that writing is for him a kind of medicine, the sole effective release from overwhelming depression and fear of death. Such writing can be an act both of communication and self-alienation, an expression of an ambivalent repulsion-desire toward death.

But is not this ambivalent emotion in the very core of life today, when not only whole nations are seized with death-impulses, but the blind world-struggle for unity in itself creates fresh hatreds and divisions, and the individual's whole self is outcast? It is not alone the psychotic who is exiled, who finds his environment predominantly inimical, but huge populations which can search for communion only in the pursuit of death and an almost masochistic abandonment. Green, from his own angle, insisting that the shadowy portion of consciousness contains the race, that "the group is reincarnated in the individual," that "our lives can be explained only if they are related to those that precede them and those that follow them, like the words of a long sentence, the whole meaning of which is known only to God," is echoing the pervading ideas of our time. At this moment, his approach is not intellectually appealing; he writes somewhat as a blind man, all other senses marvellously alert, might explore a darkness. To his mind, the world he presents is no doubt more macrocosmic than any treatment of historical event; most of us, habituated to the airplane view in literature, find in it the uncanny unreality of the sub-atomic. But the closely seen is not necessarily fragile or irrelevant; it has its own epitomizing violences. And in a time of so many long views, the short ones, in art as well as in science, can be rewarding.

# MORTON FINEMAN:

## *Maxie*

Maxie stamped back and forth in front of his paper stand. The cold wind was blowing steadily around the corner. Maxie liked this corner. He liked the neon signs and the rush of people going home, the lines of buses and the big buildings. The neon signs blinked off and on around him. Maxie could remember when most of the neon signs had been put up. They were a lot nicer than the old electric signs ever were.

Maxie enjoyed the winter when it did not rain or snow because he was built and clothed to stand this sharp dry cold. His short muscular body beneath the leather jacket and corduroy pants was not touched by the wind. And the wind could not come up to his feet through the heavy, ankle-high brogans he wore.

When the rush started, Maxie worked hard, snapping out the papers from the pile under his arm, loading up again, giving change as he paced back and forth. And the heavy pile of change in his apron pockets made a soft clinking noise.

"Hello, Jew boy," a man said.

Maxie looked and grinned. It was a clerk from the tax office in the City Hall Annex across the street.

"Hello, Dago," Maxie said, handing the man his paper.

"Cold."

"Never saw a Dago that could stand the cold."

The man laughed and raced for the bus.

"Hello, Maxie."

"Cold, ain't it, Miss Douglas?"

"Um," the woman said, smiling and closing her mouth quickly.

Maxie worked his papers down, stamping his feet and facing the wind.

"Hello, Irish."

"Hello, Jew boy."

"Keep your feet warm, sweetheart."

"See you tomorrow, Maxie."

"What happened to Joe? He didn't get his paper."

"Flu."

"Don't let it get you."

"Tell that big Irishman I'll come to his wake."

"You tell him."

"Good night, Maxie."

"Good night, Miss Schwartz; good night, Miss Torreo; good night, Miss McLaughlin."

"Good night, Maxie. Good night. Good night."

"Hell, no change, Maxie."
"Pay me tomorrow, Al."
"Hold a *Post* for me, Maxie."
"Right."
"See you tomorrow."
"Right."
"*Ledger.*"
"Right."
"*Bulletin.*"
"Right."
"Good night, George; good night, Mike; good night, Steve."
"Right, right, right, right, right."

Maxie worked swiftly, deftly—snapping out papers, giving change. Maxie worked the papers down as he did every night. And when the big clock in the *Bulletin* window said it was after six, the rush slowed, and Maxie did not have to keep any more papers under his arm. He took the change out of the apron and put it into his pants pockets. The traffic slowed. Soon it would become even slower until the movie crowd came and quickened it. But Maxie would be gone then. Maxie would be in Levis' drinking beer and eating hotdogs and shooting darts with Reds and Itzey and Moish and Louie and the rest of them. The stand would be cleaned off and locked until tomorrow and Maxie would be in Levis'. And the jukebox would be playing there, and the girls would be there around the tables, drinking beer and laughing. The steam would come off the hotdogs and they would smell good, and the old man Levis would be there with his dirty apron.

But there was another crowd who came after the rush and before the movie crowd. They were the generals. They came to look at the big illuminated war map the *Bulletin* had put up on the wall of its buildings. They came to read the war flashes posted in the window. They were a special bunch and stood around for a long time in spite of the cold, arguing politics and war and smoking cigarettes. They'd been coming together like this ever since the *Bulletin* put up its war map. They always appeared at this time because now the police did not tell them not to block the walk.

Maxie liked the generals and their arguments. He never took part in them, but he always listened, and the generals got to know Maxie after a while. Sometimes one or two of them appealed to him to settle something, but Maxie always laughed them off.

Maxie could not get excited the way the generals did about the war. Because he was a Jew, Maxie knew what side he was on, but except for that he was here and *that* guy was there, but oh mama if that little man ever stepped around the *Bulletin* building, oh mama he would have to do a lot of talking to Maxie, and even the talk would not help him because swish, swash, Maxie would fix him because guys like that needed fixing. Maxie hooked the cold air with his right. Then he felt a little foolish. He

hoped none of the generals had seen him.

Maxie watched them and grinned. He looked at them for his favorite general, but he wasn't there and Maxie thought he was late tonight. Then a few minutes later Maxie saw him walking up the street toward the corner. Maxie waved to him. He was a funny little guy. He looked like the kind of guy that ought to have a wife and a couple of grown kids and ought to be home with them instead of coming around here every night.

"How's the general?" Maxie asked as the little man came up to him.

"All ready for the war again tonight, Maxie. Cigarette?"

"Why not?" Maxie said.

This was one of the things that always happened between Maxie and his favorite general.

"Well, excuse me, please, Maxie." The small old man smiled apologetically and turned to join the crowd.

It was when Maxie decided to close the stand that the tall thin man began to talk. The rest of the generals were quiet. The man spoke easily at first, asking rhetorical questions and gesturing with his hands. Maxie could hear him very plainly, and he tried to remember if he'd ever been here before. The man's voice was dry and humorless; though it was low, it carried clearly. But it was different from the voices of the generals. They spoke doubtfully, or enthusiastically, but they did not have the intensity of this voice, the low clear grimness.

That voice made Maxie curious. He saw the tall man's head moving, and when it turned into the light from the *Bulletin* window he could see the wide tight-skinned mouth pressed back. Maxie stepped away from the stand.

Maxie's favorite general smiled at him as he moved into the group of men. When Maxie got up close he could see that the pockets of the tall man's overcoat were stuffed with leaflets. And while Maxie watched and listened, the man's scarf came out and waved in the wind. The man had to pull down his felt hat to keep it from blowing off, but while he did this he did not stop talking.

"All I want you to do is look at the war fairly," the man was saying. "How many of you ever stop to think that maybe Germany is got a reason to fight too?"

The man paused now. The others were silent.

He continued, "I'll tell you why you can't. Because the papers don't tell us the truth." He paused again. "I know most of you voted for Roosevelt. You look like working men. Well, I voted for him too. But who did the papers support? Eighty percent of them supported Willkie. They told you lies about Roosevelt, just the way they tell you lies about the Germans. And we eat it up like ice cream." He smiled.

"The concentration camps ain't propaganda," a man said.

"Maybe not," the tall man admitted, "but we got them right here in America, only we call them chain gangs."

The tall man smiled to show the others how easily he'd won the point. But another one took up the argument.

"They don't go around putting a guy in one just because he don't belong to the right party."

The tall man looked at him and smiled, then turned to the others and smiled. He smiled at Maxie too. Finally he turned around to the man who spoke and continued to look at him until he began to fidget.

Then the tall man said slowly, "You look like a working man just like I am. Why do you believe everything the Jew bankers and the Jew papers tell you?"

He was quiet. He waited for his question to take effect, and when nobody said anything he started again, hunching his shoulders and looking directly at the group around him.

Maxie began to look carefully at the men. He could not tell what they were thinking, but he saw they were listening and he wondered what this guy was getting to. That was it, he thought suddenly. That was why all the generals were so quiet and attentive. This guy had a new line. They also wondered what this guy was getting to. Maxie braced himself more comfortably. He did not like the guy. He knew that right now. He knew too that he did not like a guy who even talked about giving Germany a break, but all right, let him talk.

"The English people got nothing against the Germans," the man was saying. "They didn't want to fight them any more than we want to fight the Germans. But the Jew bankers and industrialists got them into it because they got their hooks in everything in England just the way they did in Germany before they were kicked out. The Jew bankers, the guys who own the papers and banks and factories, got the English to fight. And that's what the Jew bankers want in this country. Who owns the New York *Times?* The biggest paper in the country! A couple of Jews."

The man's voice was rising; it was shriller and grimmer now.

"They got their hooks in everything. They got their hooks in you and me, just the way they had their hooks in the German people, but the Germans got wise to themselves and kicked the bastards out," the man said. "Listen, we got their number over here, too. Plenty of us Americans are wise to the Jew boys. Plenty of us are getting ready for them, good and ready."

The tall man stopped. Talking against the wind had made him short of breath. He pulled the leaflets out of his coat pockets and began to distribute them.

Maxie got one. He stared at the yellow paper. The heading read, AMERICANS, DON'T FIGHT THE WAR OF THE ENGLISH JEWS.

Maxie watched the tall man giving out the circulars and he heard the man saying, "I don't ask you to believe this, but read it. Don't throw it away; show it to your friends." And Maxie was angry, thinking, "Right here on my corner!" angry with a new tight, sucked-out hollowness, a

dryness all through him; angry and feeling queer and alone there among the generals looking at the yellow leaflets without a word.

And suddenly Maxie tore up his circular and said to the tall man, "This is a lot of crap."

"A Jew boy," one of the men in the group said.

Maxie looked around quickly, but he could not tell who had said it. He looked at the tall man again. The tall man was grinning, and Maxie could feel the thing growing, and suddenly he knew he did not know how many of them believed this guy and how many did not, and he knew the tall man knew what he felt. He could tell it by the way the guy was grinning at him.

"That's right. I'm a Jew boy and I got my stock in the New York *Times* right in my pocket, and I own the bank across the street."

Maxie's arms hooked up, and he made fists.

"You're a liar," he told the tall man. "You're a crummy liar. Everything you said's a lie. That thing you're giving out is full of lies."

The tall man looked at the group of men and smiled.

"The only thing I got my hooks in," Maxie said, "is that paper stand, but maybe you want it? Maybe I ain't allowed to have that stand because guys like you say I ain't allowed to have it. Maybe I got to say, all right, I'm a Jew boy, so go ahead and let me have it. Listen, Mister, I want you to come around Sixth and Tasker first. We got a lot of Jew boys around there. The whole goddamn neighborhood is full of Jew boys. You come around there first, you bastard, and you won't come around any place else."

"We don't want any trouble with you," the tall man said. He looked nervously at the group of men.

"*We,*" Maxie said viciously. "So that's the way you work it, huh. First it was *I*, and now it's *we*. All right, Adolf, I'm going to wrap you up and send you to Germany—in a coffin, you bastard."

Finished with words, Maxie crouched now, dropping his head to one side, his chin digging his shoulder. Moving forward swiftly before the tall man had a chance to step out of the way, he hooked in a left, a body blow—a little awkward because of the leather jacket, but still powerful. The man began to move his fists, and Maxie with a quick little weave, set always in that fighter's motion so that he could throw left and right without any trouble, hooked again, only now with the thick right arm. It made the tall man gasp and slip, and Maxie helped him to the pavement with another one, and the man went down. He started to get up almost immediately. But as Maxie crouched, waiting to hit him again, four or five of the men got between them. Maxie felt a pressure in his shoulder and looked back quickly. It was the favorite general. "No more, Maxie, you'll bring the police." The old man's eyes were very bright as he stood close to Maxie with the other men and kept his hand on Maxie's arm.

The tall man wiped away the trickle of blood from his mouth and

stooped to pick up a bundle of leaflets Maxie had knocked out of his hand. Seeing several of the men beside him, he felt reassured enough to say in a dry, panting voice, "You'll get it very soon, baby. Right where you don't like it." He smiled at the men nearest him. Maxie started to lurch forward but yielded to the restraining grip of the old man. The tall man wavered, then looked carefully at the faces of the others grouped quietly and watchfully around him, but most of them turned down their eyes at his direct, meaningful glance, and his own angular face began to show his nervousness.

"You come around here again, I'll kick you in the teeth," Maxie said.

The tall man looked at Maxie's short hard body in its dark worn leather jacket, at the grim, wary set of his face as the cold air vaporized around the nose and mouth. He edged his way slowly out of the center of the group, stuffing the rescued bundle of leaflets in his pockets. The men opened a way for him silently. He stopped there, looking at Maxie and the men, gathering himself to begin talking again. "The day is coming when we'll clean up all Jews," he said and stopped. His quick eye had caught a sudden shifting—as if resolution had taken place over this last thing he said; all the men faced him now with Maxie alert and angry in the middle; all of them an irregular but solid block.

The tall man walked away.

The silence, the taut nervousness was split as the men turned to Maxie, who still breathed hard and watched the retreating figure. A fat middle-aged man moved first. "You're okay, Maxie. A couple more Jew boys like you and there wouldn't be any bastards like that." The other men began to talk. Very quickly laughter arose. In the sound of the laughter Maxie stood motionless and one of the leaflets fluttering in the street caught his stare. His rage had been so complete his insides felt caved-in. His fists began to unclench.

The old man stayed after the others had gone. "I'm glad of what you did," he said to Maxie.

"Right here on my corner," Maxie said. The whole thing was coming to him. "Right here on my corner! I catch him around here again, I'll give him the leather right in the teeth."

He stamped his foot down heavily, then waved the broad thick toe of his shoe back and forth.

"Right in the teeth," he said, looking at his shoe.

"Which way do you go home, Maxie?"

Maxie told him.

"I'll go a little way with you. All right?"

"Sure," Maxie said.

As he walked with the old man his anger became a dignified sense of accomplishment and he decided to go to Levis' and have a couple of beers and hotdogs with Reds and Itzey and Moish and Louie and the rest of them. He had a great deal to tell them.

# RICHARD EBERHART:

## *The Expense of Critical Reason*

R. P. Blackmur: *The Expense of Greatness.* Arrow Editions.
John Crowe Ransom: *The New Criticism.* New Directions.
Allen Tate: *Reason in Madness.* G. P. Putnam's Sons.

These three books make excellent reading. You can search in them for truth, and find some; you can look for error, and find that. You can appraise them, and apprize your judgment of the result, as in an intellectual lottery. Your having read each critic before, maybe for a decade, will add to your enjoyment. If you are lucky you will find no final answers to any questions posed in these books; the heavier the arguments the more arbitrary the writing. Resisting these, you will set up your own arguments, persuading yourself of the relativity of all arguments. You will generally be in accord with what is reasonable. Comparing the volumes, each a credit to criticism, none of which could not be improved, you may feel that Blackmur is the most literary, Ransom the most logical and theoretical, Tate the most direct, polemical, and political. In Blackmur you can luxuriate, a divided glancer among the scintillating trees and growth-worthy buds of his sacred wood. In Ransom you can dwell, if you cannot function with avidity because of the unresolved complexities of the arguments. In Tate you can race along at an athletic pitch with a lucid athletic mind: he most of the three says what he means directly and forcefully.

Blackmur on T. E. Lawrence yields some knowledge unavailable short of a trip to Washington. He calculates to shock the reader by certain revelations, but only slightly modifies our conception of Lawrence. The essay is well planned and executed. While Blackmur is capable of such tactile specifications as "He walked always with pebbles in his boots," he is often the reservationist *in excelsis,* grammatically speaking. I found myself continually marking the reservations; they show sensitivity and reason, but they irritate; whether they come from a defect of will or an access of modesty, or an excess of humility, I do not know. (Examples: "The problem of Lawrence, if there needs to be a problem, is the problem of the obsessed sensibility." "This Lawrence knew, or partly knew." "Lawrence's conviction was unequal to his experience; or his experience was superior to his conviction." "Here what was seen—better, what Lawrence forced himself to see . . . ")

Blackmur's style shows as follows: "Lawrence *forced* his eyes into the looking-glass with all the impetuosity which is characteristic of a complex dread of letting go, of missing, and of going forward. His writing acquired ease, I think, only in the sense that impetuosity became a habit." The last

three terms in the first sentence are vague, unsatisfying; the second sentence is not vague, satisfies. Positive statement occurs, as "Lawrence lacked the power, or the rare abiding charity, to make, or even to see, character complete; but he had inexhaustibly the power to make a willed substitute for it." If Blackmur had not written so much criticism I do not think he would have employed *charity,* which is the wrong word for the wrong reason. It is the very literary man who uses charity on Dostoievsky a few pages later. "Except Swift, Lawrence is the least abiding writer of magnitude in English (short of Shakespeare in *King Lear*), and like Swift chose in his difficulty the subject-matter of his art." What does the first phrase mean? Blackmur is trying to be definitive, but he defines too vaguely. Good: "It is thus, I think, that we get from Lawrence a sense of unsatisfied excitement, inadequate despair, and the blank extreme of shock. But it is excitement, is despair, is shock; made actual; disturbing us; finding room within us in our tiding disorder." I find a reservation at *tiding,* but Blackmur comes from Maine.

The last chapter, "A Feather-Bed for Critics," is the other essay not already published in a magazine. I have small room for the excellent work in between. On Hardy: "We put up with what we get, no matter what the expense and wastage, in order to use what little we can discover." The essay on Yeats is easier, more pleasing reading, apparently written with less than usual tension. His attitude toward Emily Dickinson is well known; he exercises himself expertly and technically on texts (excellent instances: pp. 126 ff. and 136 ff.) He is good, too, on Melville's craft, despite his failure to define "the rational imagination."

The feather-bed essay itself stimulates. ("The everlasting effort to write is like trying to fight a feather-bed"—Lawrence.) Here Blackmur comes to grips with the critic's relation to society, "with the profession of writing, only implicitly with criticism as a separate form of writing, more especially with the obligation of the critic to use what little power he can borrow to establish the idea of the writer as a man with a profession." One leaps at once on the ambiguity of "what little power he can borrow." What does he mean by *power* here? What by *borrow,* possibly enormously significant? Follows: "It is a labor then, frankly hortatory, tactlessly moral; and it is undertaken because of those feelings, in a rising gorge, of stress, unease, and perfidious futility which forms the base of immediate reaction to the general impact of writing in America." Why *tactlessly* moral? Is not *perfidious* superficial? Then comes the phrase, "For there is a profession of society," a highly problematical idea. He wants the profession of society and the profession of writing to be the same. "Without the profession of writing behind him the individual writer is reduced to small arms; without society behind it, the profession is impotent and bound to betray itself. A deep collaboration is necessary . . ." Blackmur is full of wisdom and cogency in this work; his very failures make him the more human, endear to us his wrestlings with the spirit.

Mr. Ransom's new volume is a rich and adventuresome one, denser in texture than Blackmur's or Tate's, and carrying unusually long quoted passages. It has not enough literal criticism of poetry to suit my taste—nothing to compare with his earlier treatment of Shakespeare's Sonnets. If Blackmur suffers from inspissation of style, Ransom suffers from a constitutional politeness which aggravates his inability to lay down the law. His style is open and smooth and flowing, an example of capacious writing; it does not betray too much the occasional prolixity of his thinking. In contrast with Blackmur's thinking with his pen and Tate's thinking with his head, Ransom may be said to think with his conscience.

Ransom dares more in the way of generalization, sometimes, than Blackmur. He says of criticism in our time, for instance, "In depth and precision at once it is beyond all earlier criticism in our language." This sort of statement startles and challenges us. Is it really true? Ransom does not set out to prove his point against the past; he merely says it is so. He says of the new criticism, "It makes errors in strategy, just as poetry and fiction may do." He tries strategy on Richards but ends by only increasing our regard for Richards; since he has no comparable or superior dogmas of his own, his strategy is to prick the master. It must be said that this kind of essay is good for criticism in general; its serious regard of Richards keeps his ideas alive, and its questionings and refittings stimulate us toward our own reconsiderations and ideation. It is an ambitious study, but also so civilized and amiable as to perform a commentary rather than the reduction which may have been intended. Ransom cannot do away with Richards, the producer (in our times) of the psychological approach, by his so-called logical structure-texture oppositions, and one of the best things he has done is to point out the changes in Richards' position over a decade or more, a change supposedly salutary to Ransom as being away from the purely psychological description of poetry and somewhat toward the absolute value of cognition as against the faulty value of pseudo-statements. Being a poet, Ransom wants poetry to be something besides or more than "a very good thing, but it has no rating as a way of knowing the world. Its service is not cognitive but psychological." His aim is to support its cognitive value. But his thought is actually elusive (more so than Blackmur's).

Ransom is for logic and knowledge. The poet's eye may roll in a fine frenzy, but Richards' concern with the rolling-motor, the what or the why or the how of it, seems to him less important than the reality of the objective result, the poem on paper. "I suspect that objective cognitions are the life and death of emotional states." "I have seen too many instances where literary critics, like Mr. Richards above (on 'The Waste Land'), find the cognitive object of the poem intellectually obscure, yet claim to discover in the poem an emotion which is brilliantly distinct. I should think there is generally, and ideally, no emotion at all until an object has furnished the occasion for one, and that the critic is faking his discovery of the emotion

when he cannot make out its object; and that if he should try to describe to us the emotion he would find himself describing it as whatever kind of emotion would be appropriate towards a certain object, and therefore presently, before he realized it, beginning to describe the very object which he had meant to avoid. That seems to me the case-history of Richards' commentary on Eliot's poem above." "Emotions-in-themselves are fictions, and critical theory should not with a straight face have recourse to them."

Ransom shows Richards, by the time of *Coleridge on Imagination,* as "still trying to saddle poetry with the responsibility of stimulation, but he is finally acknowledging, with Coleridge, its cognitive effect." Later, "My opinion of the Coleridge-Richards version of metaphor as an inter-inanimating tenor-and-vehicle compound is, in the first place, that the profits of the transaction do not amount to much in themselves; and, second, that they are profits taken 'on the side' and not in the main business of the poem's argument. The metaphor is a sort of second poem attached to the given poem, like the epicycles by which Ptolemaic theory complicated the pure orbits of the heavenly bodies. We are pleased to have them, but their apologist, whether Coleridge or Richards, should concede that they mean a disaffection with the pure logic of argument."

As a strategist Ransom finds a positive weapon in his great praise of Empson. He should have done something similar many years ago, although perhaps modifying his excess. I have felt that it would take America a decade to "get into" Empson. The lethargy of mind is notorious.

The Eliot essay is thoroughly easy and lucid, complacent where the Richards essay was argumentative. "It is likely that we have had no better critic than Eliot." He neither adds to nor detracts from Eliot; his account is most readable but unprovocative. He takes Eliot to task, however, in gentlemanly fashion, as follows: "Had Mr. Eliot only served his 'literature' with half the zeal he served his 'religion'! He believes in believing the religious dogmas, not the affirmations of poetry."

I found the section on Yvor Winters exciting. It is more suggestive than Blackmur's on Winters, and should raise interesting arguments.

The final chapter calls for an ontological critic; Ransom, having not found a critic quite to his liking, strikes out for one. He thought Mr. Charles W. Morris would help, but discovered that he did not go far enough. He enjoys a good deal of philosophizing, and gets down to some excellent particular criticism of lines from Pope and from the Coy Mistress. Honesty and charm appear throughout the book; Ransom everywhere insinuates the modesty of his claims into the discourse. But I do not want to give the impression that he has little ammunition to shoot: he shoots good-sized shot from reverberatory guns.

The heft of Allen Tate's *Reason in Madness* differs from that of the two previous books. Here is the racing thinker in a vivid flash-past. None of the problems of style indicated in Blackmur, nor the problems of logic in Ransom, hinder the reader in Tate. He is direct, forceful, and pure; he

talks straight from the shoulder. The prose is refreshing to the mind. Since he is considering the supra-literary problem of "a deep illness of the modern mind," the book cannot strictly be compared with the others. "The convention of this book is the attack."

Tate believes there is "a radical discontinuity between the physical and the spiritual realms." The "knowledge" he talks of must approach the latter; "not historical documentation and information." In "Literature as Knowledge" Tate has a long go at Richards; one can only invite the reader to compare it with Ransom's treatment.

"Narcissus as Narcissus" is an estimate of his own Ode; it is somewhat disappointing, but illuminates his method of composition. He throws off, as elsewhere, splendid phrases, such as "A poem is an indirect effort of a shaky man to justify himself to happier men . . ." Neither Blackmur nor Ransom would have used *shaky*, an example of his direct, athletic usage. He is the man of action of ideas. Tate is good on the function of the critical quarterlies. At the end of the book he asks, "What is a Traditional Society?" He would like to have one. He is a courageous spokesman for order and tradition at a moment when mere anarchy is loosed upon the world. Only time will tell whether his ideas may be more, or less, justified by history. If some call him too reactionary, he has the virtue of knowing the value of integration. If he searches for reason in the madness of the times, this writer at least hopes there will always be some madness in his reason.

# WINFIELD TOWNLEY SCOTT:

## *Poet Collected---Critics Divided*

HORACE GREGORY: *Poems, 1930-1940.* Harcourt, Brace.

The gathering of a poet's books into one volume is a signal for serious critical effort at definition. This seems to have been felt by some of the critics whose reviews of Gregory's book I have seen; but they have largely expressed the wish that some other critic might face up to the task, and the result has been that Gregory's press has remained as unequal to him as heretofore. For a decade there has been a seemingly widespread acceptance of his special vitality in new poetry—a seemingly unexpressed admiration, as though those who best knew and liked his work seldom got into print about it. In considering this collection of his three books and of sixteen new poems, Allen Tate (in *Partisan Review*) and Stanley J. Kunitz (in *Poetry*) both registered respect, found Gregory "wilful"—in different ways: one, political; the other, technical,—found him strongest in his elegiac-nostalgic strain, and hoped someone would give him his due. Louise Bogan (in *The New Yorker*) haughtily dismissed Gregory as merely "lit-

erary." Richard Eberhart (in *Furioso*) performed the useful service of indicating some of the omissions from the original contents of the books and some of the more extensive revisions in certain of the poems.

Checking on the Eberhart leads, one finds that the few omissions are invariably of the weak spots in *Chelsea Rooming House, No Retreat,* and *Chorus for Survival* (if one hadn't in every instance recognized these, the poet by his omissions convinces one) ; and one finds that almost always the textual alterations result in firmer and clearer poetry, the one exception being, in my judgment, "—And to Columbus."

Yes, Gregory is literary in the sense that his work has evolved through many technical influences, from Milton and Beddoes to Eliot and Lawrence; and he is sometimes wilful—intelligently so in his use of poetic tradition, questionably so when, as at times it seems, he shapes a poem too determinedly upon some prior conception of not the poem itself but poetry or some sort of poetry in general. This last may be the infection which renders the new group of "Bluethorne" poems so difficult: they move in shifts and employ symbols the poems themselves seem neither to justify nor to clarify; they and two or three more of the new poems bear a deliberateness as if under a cold strain at poetic precipitate that refuses to occur. On the other hand, the new "M'Phail" poems project as monologuist a little man who speaks for all the ungreat and powerless and troubled in our time with eloquence and sharp, immediate, fully realized symbolism. And just as the new "Two Letters from Europe" poem carries on the brilliant lyricism of *Chorus for Survival,* so the "M'Phail" sequence develops the portraiture of *Chelsea Rooming House* to deeper ideas of reality.

For the work is much of a piece, being the product—whether deliberate in a few places, or triumphant in many—of a very keen mind and a very sensitive spirit. Gregory's emotional force wakens most strongly in ("elegiac-nostalgic") response to past time: but in a very special response —to past time as it embodies not only human frailty and mortality, but human promise and possibility. Thus it is, for one and the same reason, that Gregory has never been reduced to journalistic, proletarian verse and has (Mr. Tate to the contrary) most legitimately *used* his political-social faith in a decidedly workable combination of intellectual conviction and emotional knowledge. His best poetry has sprung as directly from modern, urban America as that of his friend and contemporary, Kenneth Fearing. The two differ in that Fearing's prime talent is satire and Gregory's is lyricism.

One just thing, certainly, has been said of Horace Gregory, and it is time to repeat it: he is, Selden Rodman wrote, "a man of letters in the full creative sense—urban, Irish, full of a restless, generous energy." As the decade closes in which Gregory secured his provocative position as poet and critic there are in magazine files, in personal lectures, a hundred proofs of the wealth of that spirit he has brought to recent writing, his own and others'. He stands surely in the newer reaches of American poetry, and this first collected volume is the completest proof of that.

# OTHER RECENT BOOKS:

JOHN DOS PASSOS: *The Ground We Stand On.* Harcourt, Brace.

This is a heartening book—one of the most heartening to come out of the erstwhile Left in some time. Dos Passos's history-writing is not quite so finished, nor are the tenets of his democratic faith so clear, as one might wish. His training has been that of a novelist, not of an historian. But, considering that his last book, *Adventures of a Young Man,* left him rather out on a limb for subject-matter—in a more honorable position than some, at that—, his fresh start is welcome.

There seems to be some misunderstanding current about his intention in this book. He is not offering a series of "pen-portraits" of Williams, Franklin, Sam Adams, Jefferson, Barlow, and Hugh Henry Brackenbridge. If he were, legitimate protest might be made over, for example, his giving a second-rate poet and diplomat like Barlow as much space as Franklin, Adams, and Jefferson put together. What we have, instead, is a narrative of events—many of them vividly realized—which are historically significant to Americans. Beginning with Cromwell and the English Commonwealth and carrying on to the famous Whisky Rebellion in western Pennsylvania, these events are pivoted around the book's major figures, each of whom represents some aspect of Dos Passos's political creed. Roger Williams, of course, stands for tolerance; and Franklin (presented in London as a youth, in a brilliant vignette) is contrasted with Daniel Defoe, in order to show how much greater an opportunity the New World offered a brainy young man than the Old World did. Just how much of a brief Dos Passos holds for "Citizen" Joel Barlow, author of *The Columbiad,* is not clear; but this American's sympathy with the French Revolution gives him the chance to hint that internationalism is at least part of the American way. Brackenbridge, author of the lively old satirical novel, *Modern Chivalry,* is found opposed to Alexander Hamilton, during the Whisky Rebellion, and their conduct provides the moral of Dos Passos's book:

> As the divines of the old days of the Commonwealth would have put it both Hamilton and Brackenbridge had "the root of the matter" in them. Though they were both vain, ambitious, pushing men, each given to moments of irresponsibility, something in their early training had engrained into their behavior the minimum of personal restraint needed to keep the fabric of a selfgoverning society unbroken . . . Today our lives depend on it.

The author's "Notes on Books to Read" is, I think, too impatient of what the professional historians have accomplished with his material, particularly when one considers that historians, in the past decades, have done their job pretty well and have had somewhat less to apologize for than writers in other fields. But this is not a serious defect. It's refreshing to have so modern a mind as Dos Passos's take up these old themes. Perhaps, after having considered the ground we stand on, he will turn to the question of just who "we" are.

Louis Filler

JOSEPH WARREN BEACH: *American Fiction 1920-1940.* The Macmillan Company.

Any art manipulates for esthetic effect the values which arise out of the social texture. Art is "pure," in Kenneth Burke's terms, insofar as it confines itself to reinforcing the existing values and to integrating conflicts among them which cannot be reconciled in the sphere of practical affairs. It acts in this way to produce in both artist and "audience" a feeling of resignation or acquiescence. The opposite of "pure" art is "corrective" art, which tends to promote the rejection of prevailing values either by showing within the artistic idiom their viciousness or their sterility or by "recommending" a set of values not operative at the time. The writers discussed by Professor Beach (Dos Passos, Hemingway, Faulkner, Caldwell, Wolfe, Farrell, Marquand, Steinbeck) fall by and large into the "corrective" bin. Beach points out that their protest against prevailing values and attitudes is consistent with their economic assumptions which are in the broad sense Marxian. The average reader, however, is not alienated as these writers are from the existing structure of authority, and neither has the "Marxian" view been well explained to him; consequently he fails to understand the perspective which offends him in these authors. And he is not aided by the writers themselves, because the modern taboo against editorial comment in fiction prevents all but Wolfe from explaining their assumptions to him. So it is to prevent the bewilderment and the quick dismay of the unwary bourgeois reader that Beach undertakes these studies.

Beach is, then, in this time of confused transition in economics and ethics, the useful interpreter of "corrective" art for the intelligent uninitiated. It is thus proper that his book should not have its main value in original insights or in contributions to critical method. The "general reader" can use and enjoy his well-written summaries of plots and reviews of char-

acters, and all but specialists will profit from his explanations of the cultural, class, and biographical origins of the authors' perspectives. His estimate, for example, of the way in which Dos Passos' war experience influenced his selection of themes and techniques is worth reading even though not new, and the same is true of his use of biographical facts to suggest the reasons for Farrell's preoccupation with the frustrations of life for the urban masses. Hemingway's distrust of ready-made terminologies of motivation Beach discusses as "empirical ethics," showing that this distrust is consistent with Hemingway's practice, "the esthetics of simplicity." Caldwell's themes are treated as the "substitutes and compensations" of an indigent people for what it lacks in variety, comfort, and security. Wolfe's development is explained as "the search for a father" and "the discovery of brotherhood," labels which highlight the unusual strength of Wolfe's tendency to carry familial coordinates over into wider social relationships.

Some aspects of Beach's approach invite unfavorable mention. First is his conception of the relationship between art and "audience." He assumes in his analyses—though not in theory—that every book has an audience composed of "standard" people with universal attitudes and values. This esthetic concept of "the standard reader," uncritically held, matches the concept of "the reasoning man" in nineteenth century economics. The fact is, of course, that readers show wide differences—and similarities too—in their evaluations, depending on their cultural, class, and personal situations. A realistic terminology of artistic values must "index" and "date" readers in the manner of Korzybski; a work is "sentimental" or "serious" or "magniloquent" not in itself, but for certain readers in different ways in certain (typical) situations. Forgetting the audience leads to the over-easy use of those traditional abstractions which ascribe characteristics to a work itself without reference to a reader-critic. Beach knows this, but in practice he usually forgets it.

Second, the relationship between the artist and his work. As any critic must, Beach sees art in terms of various metaphors. Sometimes he sees it as pictorial (two-dimensional), a "portrait of the social scene"; sometimes he sees it as architectural (three-dimensional), as in his comment that Farrell's work seems a "structure great and monumental in its proportions, something solidly based in earth and occupying space with an obstinate persistence."

This kind of metaphor—art seen as spatial and static and standing by itself—lies implicitly behind most of Beach's discussions. He uses neither so much nor so well the view of art as implement, as a functioning structure which acts for the writer as a strategy for encompassing his situation (Burke), a perspective which invites comment about the relationship between motivation and structure, to be observed in the logic of selection, of order, and of inner relationships. For example, Farrell's "excretory" attitude toward his writing ("He had to get it out of his system") might have been used as a much more suggestive clue in accounting for the particular character of his work, with its special emphases, its developments, pace, style, tone. Beach's unconcern with problems of approach is perhaps one reason why his book leaves off where the keenest critics begin.

Donald Hill

F. O. MATTHIESSEN: *American Renaissance.* Oxford University Press.

EDWARD DAHLBERG: *Do These Bones Live.* Harcourt, Brace.

*American Renaissance* deals with Emerson, Hawthorne, Melville, Thoreau, and Whitman, especially during the years, 1850-55, when much of their best work appeared. It treats them rather strictly as writers, studying their literary intentions and fulfilments, and their relations with each other, more than their whole involvement in the world. Matthiessen, an intelligent and modest interlocutor, in great part lets the writers speak, and interprets them, in their own terms. In the sense that it is an intricate receptacle of facts, his book avoids distortion—an advantage coming partly from his contact with academic research. On the other hand, he is never guilty of that empiricism, in its naivest form, characteristic of professors. Yet it remains that the book is a weak giant, bloated out of all proportion to its density. Even within its large boundaries Matthiessen feels restricted. "I have not written formal literary history—a fact which should be of some relief to the reader, since if it required a volume of this length for five years of that record [of the writing itself] the consequences of an extension of such a method would be appalling." It would have been good, then, to ask if there was not some vanity in the method. The trouble is, Matthiessen has rather too much respect for the details and the unities of 1850-55, at least for a critic, and so is caught in an elaboration of what we have long ago assimilated (e.g., Coleridge's "organic principle") or of what is obvious at first reading (e.g., Melville's relations with seventeenth-century literature).

As to Matthiessen's discussions of style and general estimates, they are rarely to be disputed. His handling seems to me most adequate in the comparatively simple cases of Hawthorne, Thoreau, and Whitman. With Emerson and Melville he is quite sound, but his terms are too often "literary" and scarcely approach a sharp definition of relations. Compare

the Emerson passages with H. B. Parkes' twenty-page essay on Emerson in *Hound and Horn;* Parkes' relative economy comes from a grasp of theological and philosophical alternatives. The pages on Melville contain many useful fragments. Matthiessen is aware that *Moby Dick* is greatly ambiguous (a condition that Winters neglects); but he might have made psychological use of the later prose pieces, almost every one of which is linked with the ambiguity.

Matthiessen criticizes within the narrow limits of Eliot's curiosity, and he is still in awe of that piece of stage-lightning about "the boredom, and the horror, and the glory." This is not entirely to the bad, for it has trained him to confront problems with nicety. And we agree that Acceptors like Emerson and Whitman are feebler psychologists than Apprehensives like Hawthorne. Fear and anxiety are great educators. They need to be experienced; but they need also to be surpassed (as *Moby Dick* to a degree surpassed them). Emerson and Whitman failed in so far as they missed the complete circle of experience. Yet one ought to admire them for their obstinacy, though of course far less than Nietzsche. "Hawthorne is a realist," Eliot says. But there is no realism, there are only realisms. For example that of Whitman: "Everything comes out of dirt—everything." In this realism Hawthorne is lacking.

Thoreau said that the writing of history should be autobiography. If Matthiessen is pale from that standpoint, not Dahlberg. *Do These Bones Live* represents a waking dream in which Dahlberg is an orator compelling the multitudes. Who could fail to be persuaded by what he says? (But who was not persuaded before he said it?) The book borrows some themes and feelings from D. H. Lawrence's *Studies in Classic American Literature* and W. C. Williams' *In the Grain.* Whereas Matthiessen is, as I have suggested, somewhat too passive toward history, Dahlberg, in abstracting experience from time, makes everything myth. He creates a pre-logical world that is full of hoots, wails, and crashes, and mangles the reader until he has no emotions to yield. Dahlberg's two chief hatreds are the State and the Denial of Woman. On the first hatred he has usually the sophistication of H. V. Kaltenborn, but on the sexual theme he is sometimes penetrating. And there are many times when his rhetoric ceases to be foolish, when there is a good mingling of Jewish, Saxon, and Indian sounds.

Gordon Sylander

## VAN WYCK BROOKS: *On Literature Today,* E. P. Dutton.
## ARCHIBALD MacLEISH: *The American Cause.* Duell, Sloan and Pearce.

Each of these two small volumes contains an expression of hope and an avowal of faith; the appeal to American writers to enlist themselves in a defense of democracy is more urgent in Mr. MacLeish's book but is nevertheless implicit in Mr. Brooks'.

In *On Literature Today,* Van Wyck Brooks ultimately finds a hope for modern American letters in the very tendency of our writers he begins by deploring—their cynicism and defeatism. To Mr. Brooks the "mood of health, will, courage, faith in human nature, is the dominant mood in the history of literature. It was the mood of Homer, and writers will always return to it . . . It is the warp of literature—the rest is the woof." But this mood, he says, has not been the mood of the last two decades in America. Under the influence of the automatic reaction against the unrealistic optimism of the Howells era, the disillusionment in the idea of progress resulting from World War I, and the triumph of reactionary forces after 1918—under these influences American writers of the twenties and thirties have drifted towards defeat and unhappiness, almost reaching the point of rejoicing in enervation and disintegration. And criticism has not asked whether the writer possessed, in Ibsen's phrase, "a conscious guiding principle" which will contribute to life, but instead has been almost completely preoccupied with technical questions. Literature has become a reporting upon the rawness and hardness of America by one of three groups—the sensitive young people who hate their communities' insensitiveness and flee to New York; the children of our newly arrived foreign population, who may have seen little else in all their lives but slums and indignities; and our expatriates, who, by excessively ridiculing provincialism, have ridiculed much that is basic in every civilization.

But does their cynicism, Mr. Brooks asks, really deny ideals, or is it not a desperate affirmation of them? These writers think they are determinists, but they are really fatalists. The distinction is important. American fatalism presupposes hope, arguing not that free will does not exist but that it is not effective. To a determinist, free will is unthinkable, not, as to a Faulkner or a Dos Passos or a Hemingway, temporarily impotent. Mr. Brooks sees a visible reaction against the defeatist mind, a hunger for affirmations, for a world that is full of order and purpose. Unfortunately he does not tell the reader precisely where he sees this reaction. He apparently has been reassured by the work of the regionalists. Europe he says, has thrown us back upon ourselves, and America has risen immensely in its power to charm us. The exiles have left the Greenwich Villages of the world, and are "cultivating

their roots where the seeds were sown, and where they are sure to yield their flowers and fruit."

Mr. MacLeish summons the writer in a more urgent tone. The American Cause "is not the world that men and money and machines built in the nineteenth century and called democracy . . . For democracy is never a thing done. Democracy is always something that a nation must be doing. The quarter sections which were freedom a hundred years ago are now not freedom. Freedom will be somewhere else." The American Mobilization, he says in the essay bearing that title, must be the mobilization of "every possibility the people have . . . to create in America the thing so many men have dreamed of and have never seen—democracy itself—democracy in action." This is the only kind of mobilization which involves the writers and artists as such. A mobilization merely to ward off "a temporary danger of attack" is not an action which involves writers as writers. But if the mobilization of today is a mobilization to build democracy in action, and he hopes it is, then the writer as writer is needed, in order to confer on the people "the power to inhabit the possibilities of their own lives," since "what a people can become is the accomplishment in act of what a people can conceive." Fascism, like it or not, is a fighting cause, and only a fighting cause can conquer it. Democracy will not become a fighting cause if war and weapons are its single aim. The beginnings of democratic hope must not be interrupted and broken off.

Mr. MacLeish's source of hope is strikingly comparable to Mr. Brooks'. "If the mobilization of America," he says, "is a mobilization of which its artists and its writers are a part, then the American cause is again the cause of the creative human spirit—the cause no enemy has ever overcome. Or ever will."

W. McNeil Lowry

## HOWARD BAKER: *A Letter from the Country.*
## THEODORE SPENCER: *The Paradox in the Circle.*
## JOHN WHEELWRIGHT: *Selected Poems.*
## JOSEPHINE MILES: *Poems on Several Occasions.*

*(The April, May, June, July issues, respectively, of The Poet of the Month series, published by New Directions.)*

The world is in the midst of a crisis, the rhythms of which cannot be ignored: everyone is, to some extent, swayed by them. The manner in which the artist has been able to fit this inexorable beat into the scheme of his art is one of the indices of his vitality and importance, and in three of the four chap-books under review here (Wheelwright's *Selected Poems* is a retrospective collection) one can see how some American writers have done this.

What are these poems *about?* Mr. Spencer has created pretty metaphysical fables of life and death, and has hinted obliquely at World War II in two poems. Miss Miles is concerned with the neon-lit squalor of the American scene under a decaying conomic order; Mr. Baker with Faith, Destiny, Psyche, the Sea, and Dogs all viewed with unnatural composure through the study window—a sort of bucolic, neo-classic thumb-twiddling. These poets, it seems, have been slow to sense, and to project adequately, the quality of atmosphere peculiar to this day, for that atmosphere is frostily clear and death stands out in it sharply defined, immense—Mr. Spencer with his effigies of death, Miss Miles with her juke-boxes and pecans, Mr. Baker with his Sea, are too occupied to see it.

The last-named poet uses traditional, even classic, verse-forms, favoring the ode in particular: he composes it in strict form, employing a period vocabulary and a period syntax. His writing is accomplished, irrelevantly reminiscent, moribund. In the macabre fox-trot of this decade Mr. Baker, complete with periwig and lace at the wrist, steps a solemn, ridiculous sarabande. (Note to Mr. Baker: *Queen Anne is dead, sir!*)

Miss Miles, for her part, (to keep up the dance-hall simile) sits against the wall, taking notes with her eye-brow pencil on her compact's mirror—the poor man's Marianne Moore. Her poems are tiny suburban miniatures, showing a nice sense of form and a keen love for the chromium-plated conceit, but the attempts, in some of them, to create an impression of profundity do not come off.

Several of the pieces of *The Paradox in the Circle* have been recorded by Mr. Spencer himself on a phonograph disc issued in the Harvard Vocarium series. As read-poems, especially, they are successful, but on the printed page their mellifluously phrased "eternals" are seen to be less important than they at first *sounded.* A tinny timbre begins to creep into the silver note. The first impression of charm was, in all likelihood, one of the express purposes of Mr. Spencer, for he says in a note that these poems "were written to be read aloud." The technique employed to this end is admirable: a clever use of refrain, and of lines repeated with only a slight change in wording. In every poem the emphasis is exquisitely controlled, the meaning made clear with taste and no little wit.

Despite the publisher's warning to the reader that John Wheelwright is "of course, a minor poet," his *Selected Poems* show, more than those of any of the other poets of this

group, the working of a considerable poetic sensibility. In addition to the excessively cagey publisher's blurb, the book is provided with a foreword by R. P. Blackmur, which mixes sense and fiddle-de-dee with alarming abandon. Wheelwright was an uneven, eccentric poet whose environment and personality played hell with his writing. He achieved a measure of real integration in the "novel" in sonnets, *The Mirror of Venus,* but elsewhere he was brilliant, silly, solemn, eloquent, in a disconcerting and unpredictable way. This the *Selected Poems* show fairly. There is none of his political poetry in this collection, but the satirical poems included, involving social and intellectual subjects, seem to me to be labored and fussy. The four sonnets from *The Mirror of Venus,* on the other hand, and such poems as "The Train Ride" and "Ave Eva"—architecturally original and emotionally vivid and compact—bear that vitality-of-the-word with which Wheelwright enriched the American poetic tradition.

Wheelwright died in 1940. Mr. Spencer, Miss Miles, and Mr. Baker are (in that order) alive and writing today—they are really poets "of" the month. New Directions is performing a service in publishing them: in no other way could we see how our tradition is faring at the hands of our poets. We can keep an eye on them, and if we don't like what they are doing, we can tell them so.

Guy Glover

CARSON McCULLERS: *Reflections in a Golden Eye.* Houghton, Mifflin.

JOSEPHINE HERBST: *Satan's Sergeants.* Scribner's.

The world of Carson McCullers is made up of "bugger and vice and nothing much nice." Most of it is the world of Krafft-Ebing and similar fairy tales, whose case histories she has tried to bring to life by substituting words for character and innuendo for blood. The result is, of course, dreary. One would not feel so bitter about this if the critics had treated her first book as a pretty good start on a good idea, but not successful; or if her publishers, before giving the critics a chance, had told her to write it over, forgetting all the nice polysyllabic words she had found in the dictionary, and to think about people as people instead of as neuroses.

As matters stand now, she takes a secure place on that pedestal of immortals which holds Gale Wilhelm and Radcliffe Hall. You *do,* of course, remember these immortals. The distinction is that Mrs. McCullers is more interested in the sexual quirks of men than of women; for, barring the mild nymphomania of her woman in *Reflections in a Golden Eye* and the unconscious delusions of grandeur of the quasi-self-portrait in *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter,* her women are fairly normal.

Both these books contain one outstanding similarity—the characters are all somewhat hermetically sealed in the pigeon-holes of their neuroses. None of them reacts on the others; they are simply brought up before you as exhibits, but they do not seem to change each other, as real people and most fictional people do. You watch them go through their paces like a series of parallel dots, and the experience is very barren.

This particular book concerns a group of figures who are supposed to be on an army post. A Major loves a Captain's wife who lives next door. The Major's wife is joining in identity her la-de-da Filipino houseboy; they see each other as themselves and merge as one. The Captain loves a Private from the barracks. The Private, an *ante-facto* zombie, loves a horse, which he rides naked in the woods, until he decides it is more fun to sit all night beside the Captain's wife's bed while she sleeps. The Captain discovers him there and (Freud's love-hate theorem q. e. d.) shoots him. The whole thing has the atmosphere of children snickering in a privy. Most people know about the juicy items she displays, but one feels that Mrs. McCullers has just been told—and by people who failed to caution her that a small degree of art would be necessary in presenting such stories to the public. She ought to learn how to write, how to build characters that are more than a pathology diagnosis, how to move them for her story, and how to be interesting without the abnormal. Already she has had printed between boards by a large publishing house a considerable number of words which she wrote. In some ways she is a remarkable woman.

Life in summer and artist colonies and in Hollywood, when narrated in novels, seems always trivial. That Josephine Herbst's calendar of a year in the Bucks County region of Pennsylvania should carry as much drama as it does is to her credit. But, when one remembers that she has formerly handled more vital and vigorous material, one wonders whether this book is not the result of a publisher's request for a hammock novel for war times.

In what is usually called a tapestry of village life, Miss Herbst presents the stories of the villagers of Merlin, weaving them in and out, but not always with success, since the impetus and focus of a single, compact story is sacrificed to gain a cumulative effect. The force of the novel is further weakened by an elaborate "flash-back" technique of reminiscence

which, applied to all the major characters, renders still looser the loose construction of her portrait gallery. The villagers are united in common concern and action by a brush fire (with possible allegorical implications), which threatens their property, and which the author intends to illuminate the true nature of the inhabitants and change the course of their lives. However, its light does not always fall clearly on the true natures, although it does change several lives. Especially dark and confused are the city people, who are dull before, during, and after the fire. It may be that rich folk are just not worth writing about, except by newspaper columnists.

But if the city people seem only to pad out the book with picayune details of existence, the stories of Mrs. Madden and, in particular, the Armstrongs are interesting. Concentration on them and on a closer relation between them would, I believe, make a stronger (but completely different) book. As it is, the reading is pleasant, but the kind that can be interrupted without regret at the whisper of a swim or a gin collins.

Hubert Creekmore

## VARDIS FISHER: *City of Illusion.* Harpers.

In *City of Illusion* Vardis Fisher has given us another chapter in a fictional history of the old West. Less successful than *Children of God,* this story of the Comstock Lode is still a vivid re-creation of the brawling, gaudy, murderous hey-day of Virginia City, the most famous of America's ghost towns.

There are chapters here as good as any Fisher has ever written, but the story suffers because of unexplained gaps and omissions. Fisher tries to tell the history of Virginia City, with all the brutality and drama that result from the discovery of seemingly inexhaustible wealth, and at the same time to follow the story of Eilley Bowers from her original poverty to millions and back again. As a consequence both stories suffer. Eilley gains her fortune in a single paragraph, and the mines finally play out in a few pages. In a story in which the central theme is the getting and spending of easy money there is a disproportionate amount of space given to characters and events that have little relationship with the main thread of action.

In spite of these faults, *City of Illusion* is well worth reading. The rise and fall of Virginia City makes one of the great stories in the whole history of the West, and the faults of the novel are minor beside its historical interest. Flannery Lewis' *Suns Go Down,* a slighter and calmer treatment of the same theme, is in some ways a more satisfactory novel than Fisher's, but painstaking research and spots of vivid writing make *City of Illusion* a solid and interesting piece of work.

Keith Huntress

## CAROLINE SLADE: *Job's House.* The Vanguard Press.
## J. S. BALCH: *Lamps at High Noon.* Modern Age.

Mrs. Slade says little in *Job's House* which she has not already said in *The Triumph of Willie Pond,* and the earlier book is much more moving, more pathetic, and consequently more forceful. She presents again the problem of relief—the inadequacy of it, the difficulties of administering it, the sufferings of those who must receive it. The problem is viewed from a different angle in this book: in *Willie Pond* most of the people were on relief; in *Job's House* most of them manage by tremendous effort to avoid it.

Job Mann is faced with the necessity of applying for relief. His first contacts with the well-intentioned social workers he finds so humiliating that he prefers to sell his home rather than accept old age assistance. He succeeds in working out a plan which will keep him and his wife happy, proud, and independent—for a time at least.

Mrs. Slade emphasizes again and again that relief is ineffective, demoralizing—only a palliative for a social illness. She has no cure to propose, however; her only object is to show relief as it is and to picture the destitute as human beings, not as cases. Though this didacticism pervades the book, the characters are all living people. And it is rather horrifying to think that Job and Katie Mann, and Bessie, and Mrs. Novinski, and Old Sam, and all the others who are struggling to keep shirts on their backs and beans in their bellies—that all of these fine people represent the economic plight of one-third of this country's population.

Another book which had its origin in New Deal activities is *Lamps at High Noon,* the first novel of J. S. Balch. He shows a Federal Writers' Project through the eyes of Charlie Gest, an indigent young author who is suddenly put into a good job on a new project. Charlie encounters many "interesting" personalities, whose self-consciously varied number is almost as confusing as their long conversations are dull. When he and a handful of his co-workers go on strike against their suave, hedonistic, politically corrupt director, the novel

picks up interest. The strike fails eventually because of the cautiousness of the authorities in Washington and the near-repentance of a labor spy whom the strikers were depending on to act with his usual duplicity.

Balch demonstrates that on occasion he can write very well—the scenes involving Charlie's family, especially his mother, being vivid and affecting, though unconnected with the main direction of the story; the surprising unevenness of his book is therefore regrettable. He might take a lesson in technique from Mrs. Slade, who can make a novel-with-a-purpose consistently readable.

Robert Bauer

WALDO FRANK: *Summer Never Ends.* Duell, Sloan and Pearce.

There is, conceivably, something to be said for the notion that life is rather a futile business. But it ought to be said better than in Waldo Frank's novel. Mortimer Crane, (for whom as well as the reader) the summer scarcely begins, faces the kind of soul-searching crisis we expect from a Frank protagonist. A successful corporation lawyer, he suddenly finds his work distasteful, his wife divorcing him, his children strangers. He tries, in rapid succession, to recapture the vigor of his liberal youth and the wholesome love that even a Waldo Frank character may dream of. Neither of these proves quite satisfactory, but he secures peace, we are left to assume, by a vague and somewhat desperate resolution to live with his children and "know" them.

The bedroom chase of man after maid, even when vitiated by philosophic discussion, has rarely driven readers away. But the book appears to be hastily done, and the roseate ending is wishful and illogical. As in *The Death and Birth of David Markand,* the questions are keener than the answers. Bolitho distinguished between people who experiment with life and those who experience it. One might think, reading *Summer Never Ends,* that living is nothing but an intellectual exercise.

Leonard Feinberg

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